



THE  
LAST WITCH IN  
RIVENDELL

LEIGH HAILE



# THE LAST WITCH IN RIVENDELL

AN ENEMIES TO LOVERS FATED  
MATE ROMANCE

LEIGH HAILE



WIZARD OF THE WORD



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## CHAPTER ONE

THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING again. If they find me this time, they will kill me. It's hours past curfew, and here, in the middle of a heavily guarded werewolf territory is the last place a witch like me should be.

I can already picture my death, my bones snapping between ferocious teeth, and then my lifeless body left for the worms to feed on for Stars know how long before the groundskeepers stumble upon it. For us witches, simply existing is reason enough for death in Rivendell and pretty much elsewhere. Killing witches is a sport.

We are mere servants- powerless, worthless, and at the mercy of the Eastons, the Alpha family. The prominent family owns every square inch of the town, including the vast forest that I have woken up in for the third time in a row. The chill in the fall air does nothing to comfort me as I survey my surroundings. I'm in a clearing in the forest. I can almost see the lights from town here. I'm closer to the edge of the Easton's property than I had been the last two nights. If any of their wolves find me out here, it'll be the last time I see my breath on the wind.

It's not that I don't value my life. If I knew what was happening to me or how to stay tucked in bed all night, I wouldn't be here in the first place. The first two times, I was lucky, but my escapades can only go on for so long around

creatures with heightened senses before one of them sniffs me out. Going by the uneasiness coiled tightly at the pit of my stomach, tonight could be the night.

I've thought about running away, especially now that the blackouts are frequent, but I can't leave the other witches. Plus, I don't think I can get very far without a wolf pouncing on me.

The witches are the only family I know. My parents were victims of the massacre. I was barely six months old when a sweet old woman rescued me. Once I was old enough to assess my surroundings, I was living with the servants, and I have been serving the Eastons since.

I would have to be the worst kind of person to increase their workload, especially now that the alpha's heir is expected to come back soon, and festivities will be a daily thing.

When I finally snap out of my thoughts, I start retracing my steps back to the servant's quarters like I have been doing the past two days. However, as soon as I turn around, I am met with glowing silver eyes that resemble a werewolf and a low, dangerous growl, that confirms my fears.

An enormous wolf with luscious black fur, an intense gaze that is locked to mine, and its sharp teeth bared at me, steps out of the shadows and into the moonlight. My heart is hammering so hard that I can hear my pulse pounding in my temples as it gets closer.

Out of all the wolves I have ever seen, this one takes the crown for being the burliest and the most petrifying. Its nostrils flare as it takes in my scent. It huffs through its snout, froth forming on its mouth, and I gather that it has just figured out that I'm a witch. It watches me, its murderous glare daring me to make a move.

I desperately want to move, but for some reason, my feet are stuck, and I can't stop staring into its eyes. They are alluring, drawing me in and tempting me to figure out the mystery behind them. They are the most striking eyes I have ever seen, that is, if you ignore the menacing stare.

The wolf moves in slow and calculated steps, the sound of its paws snapping on twigs and my ridiculously loud heartbeat being the only sounds in the air. It closes in the distance between us, its warm breath brushing against my skin.

*This is how I die.*

My eyes shut close as I wait. It circles me as I imagine a predator would, taking in my scent. A few seconds go by, and when I open my eyes, it snarls at me, its sharp teeth crashing against each other. In a moment of panic, a spell comes to me like a memory I don't remember having, a saving grace.

*"Delendis rit conferatur,"* I whisper shakingly.

Nothing happens. The wolf cocks its head to the side, studying me. The spell was supposed to do something. I'm sure of it, but I've never cast before.

Something compels me to repeat it, and I do, louder and firmly. A surge of power washes over me, both familiar and completely new at the same time, and I direct it all to the wolf. However, its stance is unrelenting, and it barely moves. The wolf growls and sets its body into a pouncing position.

It was stupid of me to utter the spell in the first place, and now I am going to pay for it. I wish it was all a dream and I was back in my bed. As soon as the thought pops into my head, my body is pulled into a void. The last thing I see before darkness engulfs me is a promise of death in the wolf's eyes.

I land on a soft surface, and it takes me a minute to assess my surroundings before I finally let out a relieved breath. I am back in my bed, and most importantly, I am alive. I've never been so happy to be in my tiny room. My near brush with death still has me spooked, so I do the only thing that makes sense to me now. I get under the sheets and pull the covers to my chin with my shaking hands.

Thoughts swarm in my head, but one thing is clear amidst the chaos. They will be coming for me. I can feel it in my bones. All I can do is wait. I can't fall asleep knowing that someone knows my secret- not just anyone- a werewolf. I toss around



the twin bed for the rest of the night, listening and waiting for them to storm my room.

I haven't told a soul about my blackouts. The walls are thin, and you never know who's listening. Besides, I am terrified of admitting that there's something wrong with me.

In another time, having blackouts would have been considered a normality, but times have changed since, and such things are now a death warrant. Witches aren't supposed to possess a morsel of power. We forfeited it years ago during what we consider the darkest time for witches in history.

The tale, told in whispers and in the dark, since werewolves don't appreciate the reminder of what happened, narrates the onset of prejudice against witches. When I first heard the story at six years old, it aimed to keep hope burning that someday we would be free, but hope has become a distant memory over the years. Whoever tells it ends up with a cloud of sadness hanging over them and streaks of tears on everyone's faces.

Witches were tortured and killed. Their blood stained all of Rivendell so that the streams ran red for weeks. The few who managed to survive gave up their powers in exchange for their lives and became servants to the werewolves.

Many have suffered the same fate as their predecessors for rebelling. I can only imagine what will happen to me if they discover I still have my powers. I've done well to keep them hidden this long with Maggie's help, but now...

Exhaustion overcomes me sometime during the night and I wake up to a face, scrunched in concern hovering above me. As I sit upright, the events of last night come rushing into my head.

"What is it?" I ask Becky, my best friend, who looks close to tears.

Whatever it is, it can't be good.

"I need you to cover for Maggie. She's sick again."

A tear strays from her eyes, and my heart breaks. Maggie is one of the older witches and the woman who took me in. She has been serving the Eastons for as long as I can remember.

However, lately, Maggie's health hasn't been the best, and the werewolves would rather choke on silver than allow Maggie to see their healer.

There's only so much the rest of us can do for Maggie. We have brewed all sorts of teas and crushed herbs, but she keeps getting worse. The least I can do is lighten her workload.

"Please, Alyssa, breakfast is about to be served, and you know what will happen if she's not there."

I don't even want to think what they will do to poor Maggie. Normally, my tasks in the Easton household are cleaning. My clumsiness could never allow me to handle the delicate china or even serve meals gracefully. This is going to be a first.

"Okay," I agree, knowing I could be walking into a death trap.

"Hurry, they are about to start."

There's barely time to freshen up as I throw on my uniform, hoping that by the end of the breakfast, I'll still have my head attached to my shoulders. I join the bustle in the kitchen and for a minute, I forget my troubles.

A glass pitcher of water is shoved into my hands, and then a group of us are ushered urgently into the dining room. I will always be in awe of the extravagance the Eastons showcase, and with guests coming in today, it has multiplied tenfold.

The buzz going around is that Mr. Easton's son will be back today to take over as the Alpha after being away since his mother's death. Becky made a big deal out of the event, but I don't see anything special about it. It's just another case of an entitled wolf rising to power without working for it.

We line up along the walls as guests start streaming in. The rest of the servants rush to the table, but I get left behind, not knowing what to do. I watch in awe at how swift the servants are, and pretty soon, a wolf waves me over. Then he walks in.

The chatter in the room dies down as everyone turns to look at him. Oblivious to the attention on him, the man walks with a confident stride that exudes power and takes a seat next to the alpha.

I must say that is one good-looking hunk of a man. Half of the women in the room swoon after him, and I am no exception. He has the most exquisite sun-tanned skin, inky black hair, sculpted cheekbones, and mouthwatering stubble against his jaw. He might as well be naked because I can already picture his body beneath his clothes. The way they fit perfectly on him certainly helps with the imagination.

Our eyes meet across the distance, and I freeze. I recognize those eyes. Those silver orbs haunted my thoughts all night. My throat dries up, and the room starts to feel like it's closing in on me, smothering me and cutting the air from my lungs.

The pitcher falls to my feet, water splattering everywhere. Still, I don't take my eyes off him. I don't think I can. There's no empathy or warmth, just pure distaste in those stony eyes. Before I can be reprimanded for the pitcher, I sneak out, excusing myself to get cleaning items for the mess. I'm immediately replaced by another witch with a fresh pitcher as I bolt from the room.

## CHAPTER TWO

I'VE NEVER REALLY LIKED small towns. There's nothing to do here; everybody knows each other's business, and the town itself is certainly not charming. Rivendell is the literal description of such a town, although my view might be biased from my unpleasant memories.

I prefer the hustle and bustle of the city, anyway. There, no one cares that I'm the heir to the most powerful pack in the country, unlike in Rivendell, where people worship the ground that I walk on. My arrival has been anticipated for at least a month, and I've been dreading it. When I left Rivendell, I vowed to never return, but unavoidable circumstances dragged me back into this hell hole.

I discreetly got to town hours ago, ahead of my expected arrival to get a feel for it before people make a big deal out of my return. The reason for my discretion stems from one of the many things I hate about the town. Word travels quickly here, and after I saw firsthand the witches killing my mother when I was young, I don't trust anyone.

I was only seven when it happened, but the events are still fresh in my mind. It was brutal and gory. A scene that has replayed repeatedly in my head for the last twenty years. It is the reason I went away in the first place. I couldn't bear being in the same town as her killers. Walking past the room where it

happened, I see her lying there lifelessly. Even now, everything is still tainted with her memory.

I was old enough to sense the tension between creatures and to know what was going on. My mother hosted peace meetings where creatures yelled over each other, but they became concerningly loud over time. According to my father, it was nothing serious. He, of course, didn't want to bore a seven-year-old with the details, but I already knew what it was about. A power struggle.

Creatures were divided, and one thing was clear. They didn't want my father as the leader. They all wanted a piece of power. More so, the witches and vampires who made sure the whole house heard their points.

My mother was the peacemaker. Against my father's wishes, she proposed to form a council where creatures would have an equal share of power, and for her reward, they stabbed her in the back.

It was on a full moon, and the yelling was deafening as usual, but this time, there was something sinister lingering above the argument.

I remember covering my ears, and the next thing I knew, there was silence. I knew she was dead even before my dad came to get me. The scent of her blood saturated the air, filling even the tiniest cracks to the point that it got nauseating. I got a glimpse of the scene before my father whisked me away, blood splattered on the walls, her features unrecognizable, except for her haunting green eyes which stared at me empty.

Everything was cleaned up, but nothing was the same after that. The stains were there to stay, and no amount of bleach or renovations could cover them up. Her body, or what remained of it, was burned days after.

My father saw to the punishment of her killers, a group of witches who deserved everything that happened to them. Justice was served, but I couldn't fathom living within those walls again.



I lashed out for a while and became a menace before my father sent me away fearing that I would lose my humanity. Since then, my hatred for Rivendell and witches has been rooted deep in my heart.

Looking at the town, Rivendell hasn't changed at all in the twenty years that I've been gone. There's nothing special about it. Well, except for her.

She changed my views about this town within seconds of meeting her. Things turned out to be more interesting than I had expected, and that's saying a lot for a place where nothing thrilling happens.

Her scent drew me to her, a fruity and sensational fragrance that I haven't been able to forget. I can't stop thinking about her, even though she should be the last person in my mind. She's a witch, for Star's sake, my biggest adversary. Nonetheless, I still see her honey-blond hair, and her hardened nipples that poked through her nightgown, those stunning big blue eyes, the silhouette of her body through the gown, and her lips, full and rosy, almost like they were meant for kissing alone.

I'm still in denial that she is my mate even though it was clear as day once I set my eyes on her. Her kind murdered my mother, and we are from two different worlds. We are not the right fit for each other, and I've managed to convince myself that there was an error in my judgment.

My wolf, on the other hand, is ecstatic after finding its mate. I already know that it won't allow me to leave without her. The city has suddenly lost its appeal, and my wolf could care less about running around the world, as was the plan after my crowning. I don't plan on changing my views about witches. I can already feel the start of the struggle between me and my wolf, but I'm going to stand by my beliefs. Witches are crafty, and she proved me right last night.

Witches were stripped of their powers after my mother died. It was only right to atone for what the rest had done and to avoid future similar incidents. The werewolves made sure that the

witches were powerless, including newborn babies, so you can imagine my surprise when I bumped into one with magic.

It was different from anything I have ever experienced. There was a ringing sound in my ears, which progressed to a raging headache all night. If she had more confidence in the spell, it would have knocked me off my feet and possibly blown my head off. I should be concerned that she is a threat to the territory. Instead, I'm intrigued.

*How long has she had her powers? What was she doing in the middle of the forest? Does anyone else know about her magic? How did she get past the guards? Does she know that her nightgown turned me on more than any piece of skimpy lingerie?*

I have to find out everything I can about her. I don't intend on ratting her out. I have a plan for her, and it must sound sinister and sadistic, but it would be amusing to watch her fret knowing that the future Alpha knows her secret. Besides, I find it endearing how expressive her face is.

I wasn't expecting to see her this morning at breakfast. I figured that she would have been at least three towns over by now, but there she was: the most breathtaking woman in the room. My mate. She recognized me right away. Blood drained from her face, and her blue eyes widened with shock.

For someone harboring a big secret, she is doing a bad job of hiding it. Guilt is written all over her face. It's a mystery they haven't caught her.

I almost feel sorry for making her drop the pitcher, but it doesn't come close to the satisfaction I felt when she realized who I was. I laughed off the mess to cover for her, telling everyone at the table that women usually react that way when I enter a room. She snuck out when she thought no one was watching and I was sure that this time I wouldn't see her again. However, she keeps on surprising me.

I've been watching her like a creepy stalker. I just can't get enough of her. She is currently dusting the marble sculpture in the hallway, her face set in deep concentration. I would give anything to know what she is thinking about.

She is wearing a black and white uniform, one that is meant to be modest, but I can still make out her luscious curves. The uniform falls just above her knee, and she is wearing sheer stockings that are making me hard at the thought of her in them alone.

Her long blonde hair is held back into a slick and tight bun at the nape of her neck. The hairstyle brings forth her features, but I find myself preferring her gorgeous locks framing her perfect face.

She hasn't seen me yet, watching from the top of the stairs. I'm enjoying the view, and I don't want to scare her away.

"Pretty neat, yeah? Your ceremony will be one for the books," Lance, my soon-to-be beta says, shaking me out of my thoughts.

I assume that he is talking about the preparations going on and not my mate. I don't like him. However, I have to tolerate him because he's going to be my beta soon. I would have preferred someone I could trust, but sadly, I haven't made such close friends over the years, and Lance is taking over from his father, the current beta. If he follows my orders, we'll be alright.

I grunt in response, wishing that he would leave me to my stalking.

"I can introduce you to some of the chicks if you like," he says, not getting the hint.

"Who's she?"

"Her?" He points at a brunette, next to my mate, who is making eyes at me.

The brunette nudges her and whispers her name as she turns to look at us. Her eyes narrow, and her features harden when she sees me. She's trying hard to put off a strong front, but I know she's faking it. A smirk spreads on my lips, and she looks away quickly, a blush creeping up to her cheeks.

"No."

"Oh, the blonde. I think her name starts with an A."

“Alyssa,” I repeat what I overheard the brunette call her, liking how easily it rolls off my tongue.

“I mean, she’s pretty, great in the sack, I bet, but I can get you a pretty wolf if you like. Witches are a bit standoffish.”

It’s taking all my strength not to punch him in the face right now.

“No, I want her alone to tend to me.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

I give him a stern look, daring him to question my orders.

“I’ll arrange it right away.”

I can’t wait to have her all to myself.

## CHAPTER THREE

I'M ALIVE. I HAVEN'T decided if it's a good thing yet. I've been jumpy, more than usual, and I keep looking over my shoulder, expecting the worst. It's been more than twelve hours since I exposed my secret to a stranger, who turned out to be the alpha's son, and no one has even looked my way.

I suppose he hasn't told anyone, but that only builds my anxiety. *What sick game is he playing, and how long is he going to keep it up?*

The turmoil that has nested itself in my stomach makes death look like the better option. I know something is going to happen. I just don't know what or when it will happen. Today alone, I've broken two expensive-looking vases, just because I thought I saw someone watching me out of the corner of my eye. I quickly cleaned them up and disposed of the evidence. The Eastons are so rich they'll likely never notice.

I have a feeling that the sick bastard knows what he is doing, and if he doesn't get to me first, my anxiety will. At this point, I just want him to get it over with. I'm exhausted, partly because of the million things I've had to do to make the house ready for the fancy guests and a huge chunk owed to the emotional investment I've put into this situation.

The worst part is that I can't tell anyone about it. Maggie made me swear at a young age to keep my powers secret, so I have



to suffer with my paranoid thoughts, spiraling into hundreds. I hate the fact that my fate is entirely dependent on him. All my life, I've been at the mercy of his family, and having one more person dictate how I live my life irks me to the core.

My worst fear is that he will drag other witches into my case. Hell will freeze over before I let that happen. It is the only reason I haven't left Rivendell. I won't let history repeat itself. We've suffered enough. If James Easton has a problem with me, he knows where to find me. I can handle him, I think.

Okay, I don't mean it. The thought of being alone with the future alpha terrifies me. He's not like the other wolves who would have torn me into pieces by now. He's unpredictable, unnerving, and has a dark presence that tells of how dangerous he can be. However, something about the threat lurking behind his eyes lights a fervent fire in the pit of my stomach. I wouldn't trust my body around him.

He is the epitome of sexiness, a Greek god in the flesh. I'm ashamed to admit that I've sexually thought of James. In my defense, I can't think of a single person who wouldn't do the same. The man is gorgeous.

"Alyssa!" Becky nudges me for the umpteenth time, and I wag away my thoughts, embarrassed that I've been caught so obviously in the middle of a daydream.

"Are you even listening to me?" she complains, her lips sticking out into a pout.

"Yes," I lie.

In the twenty minutes of our hour lunch, Becky has been talking non-stop and I don't want to be a bad friend, but her voice keeps on floating around me. My mind is not settling into the current conversation well.

Becky makes a face and bites into her sandwich, "As I was saying, Master James is hot. It's too bad he's not a poor warlock, otherwise, I would have snatched him right up."

My ears burn hot.

"What do you think?" she asks between mouthfuls, turning to face me.

“He’s okay.”

I bite into my sandwich to hide how appealing Becky’s point sounds. If things were different, if we were in the same social class, and if he wasn’t holding my biggest secret hostage, maybe then I would toy with the idea of us being together, but that’s not the case and I can never think about him in that way.

“His mate is one lucky girl.”

I stop chewing. I hadn’t thought about his mate. The sting of resentment that pierces my heart at the thought of her comes as a surprise. I shouldn’t care about her, whoever she is, yet the thought of him having a mate threatens to bring up the sandwich that I’ve just consumed. I know it’s ridiculous since I don’t stand a chance with the master.

“Yeah,” I say, ignoring the disappointment that floods my heart.

“Alyssa Martins.”

I tense at the mention of my name. This is it, the moment that I’ve been dreading for so long. He has finally decided to come for me.

“Yes,” I answer meekly to the head of staff, Mike, a stern wolf who always looks like he’d rather be somewhere else.

Everyone looks at me, their faces readable. They are all wondering what I did wrong. We’ve all seen it happen before. Mike comes in, calls one of us, and then we never see them again.

“You haven’t finished your morning duties.”

I can’t even begin to explain the sense of alleviation that washes over me. I could kiss Mike right now. I truly thought that my end had come. It then dawns on me that I’m smiling like an idiot when there’s nothing to smile about according to Mike’s face.

“What do you mean?”

“Mr. Easton complained that his room wasn’t cleaned.”

My face scrunches up in confusion. I cleaned the room this morning. I'm sure of it. It's one of the places where I broke a vase.

"I cleaned it."

"I'd suggest you do it again," Mike says sternly.

I know better than to argue with Mike. Such arguments never end up well. I grab my cleaning supplies and prepare mentally for another hour of scrubbing. Becky gives me a sympathetic smile as I leave.

"Master James expects his room to be spotless."

The sandwich I've had threatens to come back up. I should have known Mike was referring to the younger Mr. Easton. This is his style, getting off on my humiliation and suffering.

"Get to work!" Mike orders.

"You are so lucky. Please let me know what he smells like. I bet it's divine," Becky creeps up to my side and whispers in my ear.

I groan. She doesn't understand my predicament. I'm just hoping that he is not in his room. It would save me a lot of my self-dignity and unnecessary stress.

It takes me five more minutes to get to Master James's room than it normally would. I would be lying if I said that I'm not nervous. My stomach is in knots. I walk over to the guard on patrol, hoping that he will ease my worries.

"Is Master James in?"

The guard looks at me, disgusted by my presence, and ignores me.

*Well, that wasn't helpful,* I think to myself as I walk to his door and debate whether to walk in or to knock. After a two-minute deliberation, I opt for the former, crossing my fingers and hoping that he is not on the other side of the door waiting for me.

I would hate to be stuck in the same room with him when my feelings are all over the place and my stomach is in knots. I

look around holding my breath. Luckily for me, Master James is not in his room. I release a sigh at being alone.

I take a deep, anchoring breath as I start working quickly so that he doesn't find me here. James's room is twice as big as the servant's quarters. I am usually tasked with corridors and windows. I never imagined how big the suites were. The witches could fit in here comfortably and there would be still some space left.

There's nothing personal that would suggest the room belongs to him. It's minimalistic: a king-sized bed, a bedside table, a door that I suppose leads to the closet, and another to the bathroom. Becky was right. The room alone smells heavenly; sandalwood, tempered with a sexier and muskier fragrance, nothing that could ever be found in perfume bottles.

I frown at his unmade bed, the only mess in the otherwise spotless room. There's a T-shirt on the bed, a black one that I'm sure I saw on him this morning. I am tempted to take a sniff, but I look away before I can act on it.

That would be outright weird. However, I find myself reaching for it and pressing it to my face into it. I can't help the moan that escapes my lips. His scent is out of this world, intoxicating. I could bury my face in his shirt forever.

"What are you doing?"

I quickly throw the T-shirt back on the bed and jump back. Heat rises to my cheeks and then to my whole face, imprinting embarrassment on it.

"Nothing," I squeak.

I turn to face him and my jaw falls. The Master is naked save for a towel around his waist that is hanging loosely and dangerously low. I couldn't stop my eyes from roaming all over his body even if I wanted to.

His body, like his face, is a work of art. It's a mass of sculpted muscles, chiseled abs, and a few veins popping out temptingly, all stretching across the tanned skin. My eyes stray to his lower body a couple of times, each time wishing that the towel would fall off.

When I look back at his face, he is smirking, as if he knows the effect the scene has on my body. I follow a drop of water from his curls as it rolls down his chest, the rippled muscles of his stomach, and the V-shaped of his pelvis before finally getting absorbed into the towel. I lick my lips, envying the drop of water. I wish I could follow the same trail with my tongue.

“Do you like what you see?” he asks coyly.

My face flushes and I am suddenly reminded of where I am. I lower my eyes, avoiding his piercing gaze. I don't know how I can face him again after ogling him.

“No,” I answer quickly masking how much a drop of water excited me.

“Nothing about this excites you?”

Heat floods my lower belly. I don't trust my voice, so I shake my head. The Master grabs the end of the towel and untucks it. I shut my eyes before I see anything else that would make my arousal obvious.

He laughs, a deep chortle that rumbles right through me. My feelings range from excitement to exhilaration, and humiliation in a matter of seconds.

“I can smell your excitement,” he says lazily.

For a second there, I forgot about the heightened senses. Of course, he can smell my arousal. Something about it, maybe the way he says it, his voice raw and husky, turns me on so much.

“I'm just here to clean,” I swallow hard.

“You don't have to lie to me, love.”

I swear my knees buckle a little bit.



## CHAPTER FOUR

ALYSSA MARTINS WILL BE the death of me. I had to take a cold shower in the middle of the day to cool myself down after I let my thoughts get the best of me. Normally, I wouldn't let someone affect me so much, no matter how much sexual appeal they ooze, but since I met Alyssa, my self-control has been nonexistent. She has managed to excite me in unimaginable ways. I mean, just the thought of her in those stockings had me hard for most of the day.

It also could be the fact that my wolf is overriding my hormones to get me attached to her as soon as possible. Either way, I crave Alyssa, more than I've ever wanted anything in my life, and seeing her in my room, holding my shirt, and taking in my scent is not helping. My wolf wants nothing more than to mark her, have her smell like me, and make sure everyone knows she's mine. I might just take more showers today.

From her stunned expression, she wasn't expecting me to be around, but as part of my plan, I made sure to be here. When I heard her coming in, I knew that I had to tease her, and her reaction was worth it. She hasn't stopped blushing. However, my plan backfired on me. Her hot gaze on my body drove me to extremities of stimulation that I didn't know existed.

All I wanted to do was to kiss her pouty lips senselessly and have her on every surface of my room until we were both

spent. Just when I thought I couldn't be more aroused, the scent of her excitement almost knocked me off my feet. The feminine essence, enticing and sweet, has my mouth watering and my tongue aching to get a taste of her.

I didn't mean to point it out, but the words were out of my mouth before I could stop them. I didn't expect her reaction. Her breathing coming out heavy and labored. Her gaze becoming heavy-lidded, and her lips parting invitingly.

I now watch her struggle with her words, and I smile in satisfaction. My wolf practically purrs. I know I should be worried about the power she holds over us, but I just can't bring myself to fight my wolf on this. She's perfect.

She clears her throat and shakes her head, no doubt to get rid of the effect I've had on her. "I'm just here to clean Master James."

Normally, I hate the formality, but my name on her lips sounds different, special, and very hot.

"I don't see you cleaning, Alyssa."

I've teased her enough, but I can't help myself. I like getting her riled up.

"I..." She stops when she realizes that I've called her by her name.

Color rises to her cheeks, and I can't stop the smile that spreads on my face. I raise my eyebrow, waiting for her to continue.

"I was just getting to it, Master James," she says quietly.

Her eyes dart from her cleaning supplies to me. She is anxious, waiting for me to leave, but I am not yet done with her.

"You are special," I say blankly.

"I...I don't know what you mean, Master James. I'm just a servant like the rest," her voice wavers slightly.

"Servants shouldn't have that kind of power."

Alyssa lowers her eyes shyly and fidgets with her hands, which are folded behind her back. She then looks back at me

with glassy blue eyes, blinking away the tears that are on the verge of spilling.

“What will happen to me?”

I shrug, crossing my arms around my chest. I know I would never harm my mate, but I haven't decided what to do. I still don't know how powerful she is and what she will do with her magic.

“Don't bring other witches into this, please.”

“Why would I? This is about you unless you prefer more people to know.”

“No,” she says quickly.

It's endearing that she cares about the rest of the witches. However, I am not willing to rule out the possibility that other witches have their powers. I'm not stupid enough to let my guard down. I don't think that I will ever trust a witch.

“Great. Now you just have to do whatever I say, and your secret is safe with me.”

I'm aware of how I sound. A little blackmail could never hurt anyone. It will give me enough time to decide what to do and how to handle the situation now that she is my mate. The repercussions are severe, and my wolf would never forgive me if I condemned her to death.

“What if I don't?” Defiance burns in her eyes, and I realize this is why I have been riling her up.

I wanted her to show me something different from the meekness that is expected of the servants. I wanted her to fight back.

“You don't want to do that, love.”

This exchange has me turned on more than any flirting I've ever done. Alyssa is so worked up and sexy, I could kiss her right now. However, before I can do anything I will regret, I go into my closet to get dressed. It's risqué enough having a hard-on with only my towel on. Anything could happen.

It's a struggle, ignoring my throbbing erection. It takes all my strength to compose myself. However, it doesn't last. When I come out of the walk-in closet, Alyssa is making my bed. Her back is arched as she stretches to tuck the sheets. Her uniform has ridden up, exposing her thighs and the end of her thigh-high stockings.

The delicate lace wrapped around her porcelain skin lands just below her ass. One wrong move and I could end up seeing more than she intends me to.

Seeing her that way gears up my thoughts and my erection. Alyssa is just unbelievably sexy even when she's not trying to be. Whenever I'm around her, I become a horny teenager. Right now, I'm imagining all the things I could do to her while she's in that position.

There's seriously something wrong with me. *How am I so horny?* My hands are folded into fists at my sides, my claws digging into my skin, and my wolf threatening to come out. It wouldn't be able to control itself around our mate. I push it down, knowing that I'll deal with the consequences later.

I clear my throat to get her attention, and she turns to face me, clearly startled. A pang of disappointment stabs me, but I shove it down quickly. Alyssa's eyes fall on the bulge of my jeans, and I don't even try to hide it. I want her to know how much I want her.

"Don't go sniffing on my clothes," I tease, and when anger manifests in her eyes, I leave, amused.

I wish I could stay and watch her all day, but my father has been requesting a sit-down. I've avoided it for as long as I can because I already know what it's about.

My relationship with him is a bit rocky. For years after my mother's death, I hated him for not protecting my mother when the witches attacked her. We never talk about her. Her death is a sour topic.

My father's wish has also been to see me back home, taking over as soon as he retired. However, I've never been interested in ruling over other creatures. When he insisted that it was

time for me to be crowned as the alpha, I devised a plan. I would accept being crowned, but I would leave the duties to Lance, my beta, and go back to the city.

I learned from a tender age that supernatural politics is a nasty game. Most leaders are ruthless and greedy for power. I've seen what creatures would do for a morsel of power, and for the longest time, I've had no interest in being a part of it.

But I haven't told my father about my plan. It would break his heart, plus I'm not so sure if I want to go back to the city now that I've found Alyssa. I might just stay.

I find him in his study, a room that holds a lot of memories. This is where she was murdered. It was once an empty room, turned into a meeting hall, and after she died, my father converted it into his study.

I've never stayed in the room for more than five minutes. The scene from twenty years ago still haunts me and there are pictures of her everywhere, reminding me how I miss her. My father, on the other hand, spends all his time in the room. I don't know how he can deal with seeing her everywhere and being okay with her absence.

The years have taken a toll on him. He looks way older than he is, even though most werewolves age slowly. Now that I've found my mate, I can only imagine the pain he went through losing her. The thought of never seeing Alyssa again breaks my heart. For the first time, I feel sorry for him to have had to deal with my tantrums when he was mourning his mate.

"James," he looks up from the newspaper on his desk and gestures for me to have a seat across the desk.

It feels strange being here.

"I've been meaning to talk to you about your responsibilities as the Alpha once you take over from me," he starts, and I drown out his voice, my focus fixed on the huge portrait of my mother hanging behind him.

I recall how beautiful and kind she was. My father was the Alpha, but she was the one holding the pack together. She treated everyone equally, although it was frowned upon for



prominent families to associate with poorer creatures. She didn't deserve to die.

"...being an alpha is a great responsibility, and you need someone to help you rule the pack," my father's monotone comes back to me.

I resist the urge to roll my eyes. I know the script. I've heard it only a hundred times before. He insists on me finding a pure-bred werewolf as my mate as if I have a say in the matters of fate.

I know he would freak out if I told him that I found her and that she's a witch. He would never accept Alyssa as my mate. She's not up to "Easton standards," being at the bottom of the hierarchy chain and given what happened to my mother. I'm not sure why fate chose her, but I've accepted it.

"I've made a lot of mistakes during my years as Alpha," he pauses and gets a faraway look in his eyes as if he is recalling the past.

I know he's referring to my mother. He's hinted how he regretted not protecting her to strengthen our bond in the past. It never really worked. I was a stubborn child and thought he could have done more, though I don't blame him.

"Your mother was my biggest supporter, and believe it or not, she made the big decisions around here. She made everything easier, and I owed her so much."

A few tears gather in his eyes, but he blinks them away. I give him a tight-lipped smile, hoping that he knows I don't blame him for her death.

"I want you to experience the same."

My mind drifts to Alyssa. *Is there a possibility that we could work? Will she accept that she's my mate?* Two creatures from different social classes and species with unsolvable differences. It seems unlikely and impossible, but my wolf still holds out hope that we will be joined for eternity. I'm not yet sure what that would mean for the rest of the witches.

He clasps his hands in front of him, "Now, there are a few of my friend's daughters who haven't found their mates. I'll

introduce you at the ceremony, and maybe one of them will be your perfect match.”

I’m surprised that I’m not excited to meet new girls like I normally would be. It all sounds boring and exhausting. Nothing like what I want with Alyssa.

## CHAPTER FIVE

*I HATE HIM.* It's not just empty talk. I mean it. He's so full of himself, a big jerk, and impossible to deal with. I'm convinced that he is a sick bastard who gets off on humiliating other people. I admit that it was out of place to sniff his shirt, but he didn't have to make a big deal out of it. I swear if he tells anyone about it, I'll pluck out his claws.

I'm just so frustrated and furious that all I want to do is scream, preferably at him. Have I said how annoying he is? I can't stand James Easton, and I hope that we will never have that kind of interaction again. From now on, I'm going to make sure of it.

I haven't processed what happened in his room yet. I don't think I can do so without my face burning with embarrassment or my body reliving the flare of desire it experienced. I acted out of character, and it's his fault for looking that good and not having any sense of decency.

I'm pretty sure most of my frustration has to do with the fact that he teased me, turned me on to the max, and then left me high and dry. I wanted to get my hands on him, feel every muscle, taste every inch of his skin. I wanted to eat him up.

I want to say that I don't want to anymore, but I'd be lying. My palms are still itching, and my mouth is watering at the thought of tasting his olive skin. I bet he tastes just as exquisite

as he looks. I'm flattered that James was as turned on as I was, and I must say that he is packing. It's impressive.

However, I've concluded that whatever is going on between us is just pure lust. It's the only explanation I can think of for the tension between us. I'm giving it a week max, and it will fade away. In a week, James will find someone of his stature to unleash his sexual frustration on, and I will have forgotten my attraction to him.

Besides, he will have been crowned Alpha and be with his mate by then. Nothing will ever happen between us. The thought strangely makes me sad, but that is our reality.

Despite that downer, I can't believe that I'm attracted to the young Master. He has not been nice to me, not even once, and he is blackmailing me. He might be the alpha's son, but he has no right to intimidate me. I will not allow his threats to get to me. It's not my fault that I still have my powers, and if he had a single working brain cell, he would be figuring out which werewolf failed their duty instead of focusing on me.

After I'm done cleaning his room (an important thing to note is that I didn't sniff anymore of his clothes), I pull myself together, still aroused, frustrated, and angry, and muster my best poker face. Becky is notoriously observant, and I know she'll be waiting for me to spill the juicy details. I can't risk anyone knowing about what has happened between James and me, even if it was only embarrassment.

The thought of someone overhearing our conversation has sobered me up.

"So, how was it?"

As I predicted, Becky is eagerly waiting for me as soon as I am done cleaning. She is so excited, it's ridiculous. I wish I could tell her everything, but whatever happened between the Master and I, feels too private. I'll just omit some details. She doesn't need to know how hot and bothered I was or how I embarrassed myself.

My pile of secrets is growing by the day, and I feel guilty and like the worst friend for keeping them when Becky shares

every single detail of her life, no matter how minuscule, but then I've been feeling a bit selfish about him.

"Tiring," I answer curtly, settling down my cleaning supplies on the floor.

We are in the basement, which also doubles as the witches' kitchen. It's where we hang out to pass the time after we are done with our duties for the day.

"Come on, give me the details," she rubs her hands together.

"Why are you dying to know about him?"

I sound so territorial. I try to cover it up by adding a fake laugh at the end, but it comes out all weird. Good thing Becky seems too preoccupied with his looks to notice.

"He's just so dreamy and mysterious. Give me something juicy."

"Well, he's bossy and cocky."

"Really?"

"Yes, and a big jerk. He kept telling me how to do my work," I exaggerate.

"Oh, I didn't expect him to be like that," her face falls.

"Yeah, he's terrible."

"At least tell me he smells nice," she lights up again.

Busted. I turn red.

"Is it hot today?" I fan my face with my hand.

"No," Becky shrugs. "Does he smell nice?"

She's not going to let this go. The answer is on the tip of my tongue: sexy sandalwood. "No, he smells like a normal guy."

"That's disappointing, but on the bright side, you are the envy of all the girls. They have been begging Mike to change their duty rosters so that they can be around him, but Mike said he specifically requested you."

"Why?"

Becky shrugs and laughs, "Maybe he fancies you."

I join her, but my chortle sounds too fake.

“He’s so…” I find myself saying without thinking.

“What?” Becky leans in.

I groan in frustration, lacking a better word to describe how controlling and dominant he is without including that both of those traits got me so worked up and turned on at the same time.

“...annoying,” I say.

“You know Maggie told me that he was a bit of troublemaker before he left Rivendell.”

“Really?” I lean forward, interested.

“Yes, he was lashing out after you know who died,” she whispers, looking around to make sure no one heard her.

Over the years, we’ve witnessed witches dying just because they mentioned the dead Luna’s name. Witches are not worthy to talk about her.

“He did all sorts of things. Maggie wouldn’t say what, but I bet it’s something bad.”

“Yeah,” I agree absentmindedly.

“Maggie said that he saw it all when it happened. It must have messed him up.”

I picture a young James, watching his mother die. I feel sorry for him. No child should go through that. I can only imagine how traumatized he was.

“Anyway, I don’t think he’ll be around for long. I heard Lance saying that he will be going back to the city after his crowning ceremony.”

There’s that pang of disappointment again.

“But he’s the alpha,” I say, but my voice comes out a pitch higher.

Becky shrugs, “I have to go. These parties will be the death of me.”

She leaves, and then I'm left alone with my thoughts. James can't go back to the city. How's he supposed to rule from there? To make matters worse, his crowning is in a week. *That's too soon. I don't want him to go.* I surprised myself at the thought. *It would be easier if he left. My secret would be safe, and I could find a decent warlock to settle down with if James wasn't around for me to lust after.*

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That night, I go to sleep dreaming about James, but somewhere along the night, my dream changes. However, I'm not sure if it's a dream or if I'm experiencing another blackout. It feels too real.

I'm in Rivendell. I can smell the inns, whisky, and meat. It looks the same, but there's something different about it that I can't place. I'm on the street barefoot and alone, staring at my breath in the wind. I can feel the chill in the air around me. My cold feet start moving of their own accord. I don't know where I'm going, but there's an invisible pull drawing me to Lord knows where.

I don't know how long I walk. I walk past the closed stores before I figure out that I'm walking away from the town. I've never been this far from the Easton's mansion. There's a straight road and wheat fields on the sides. I walk for a couple more minutes, and then I turn left, right into the thick farm.

I don't feel the prickle of stones and twigs on my feet, but I do feel a bit spooked. The feeling intensifies as I get deeper into the field. I imagine how ghostly I must look in my white dress, standing in the middle of nowhere.

I stop abruptly on a small patch of a clear field. I shudder at the cold air that runs through me. There's something here. It feels dark and dangerous, but I'm curious.

I reach out my hand, and I grab something that feels like an odd doorknob. The air around me whooshes as a strong wind out of nowhere blows past me. I try to let go of the invisible knob, but my hand no longer feels like it belongs on my body.

It's stuck to the knob, and no matter how hard I pull, I can't let go. Panic sets in, and then I hear the voices, quiet at first. I can't hear them clearly, and I can't tell how many of them there are.

They grow louder by the second. It takes me a minute and a splitting headache to figure out that the voices are in my head. They are extremely shrill and a mixture of screams, unidentifiable words, and cries. One familiar voice stands out, but the others are drowning it.

I can't seem to single it out. The screams fill my head, and the pain is excruciating. I cry out, but it only gets worse. I fall to my knees, weak from the pain. I feel like I'm going to pass out. This is too overwhelming. I want to go back to the days when my blackouts were just me walking around.

I can't take it anymore. I let out a scream, louder than the voices, and they quiet down. Relief washes over me as the pain fades away.

"*Ulciscor specialis*," the familiar voice says, the words echoing in my head.

The voice is eerie, almost haunting. I wish I understood what the words meant. I know that they are important. I can feel it in my gut. However, my Latin is failing me.

The voice goes on and on until I pass out from the lull of its repeated words.

I wake with a start. My hands are shaking, there's sweat on my pillow, and I now know what the words mean.

This is why I've been sleepwalking. They have been calling me.

The witches want me to avenge their deaths.



## CHAPTER SIX

I DIDN'T EXPECT SUCH a huge attendance. I thought it was going to be an intimate dinner party with close friends, but it's a full house, and I don't know half the people here. The other half consists of people I met when I was a child, and no, I can't remember them no matter how many times they ask. There are even guests from other countries, an exaggeration if you ask me.

It's just a welcome-back party unless I'm missing something. My father has outdone himself, although I think the credit should go to the people who put in the work. The living room and the drawing room have been transformed into a massive hall. There's a stage where a man is playing a saxophone, and there are all sorts of creatures gathered everywhere, with the noticeable absence of the witches.

There's an endless supply of mead going around from my father's collection, and I suspect that most of the guests are already drunk, including their host, who's animatedly telling a story by the fireplace.

Years ago, I'd have been the one entertaining the guests, but I've outgrown such a crowd, and right now, I'd rather be elsewhere. I've spent the better part of the night observing the crowd from upstairs. I've concluded that the elite are a bunch of pretentious creatures.

The conversation has been centered around my family. A big percentage has expressed their hate for the Eastons. The mead has loosened their tongue, and they have forgotten that werewolves have super hearing. There have been speculations about my mate, and they couldn't be any more wrong. Everyone assumes that I'll naturally gravitate to the neighboring territory. If they knew my mate was a witch, they would all freak out.

Speaking of mates, I haven't seen Alyssa for the last couple of days. I've been preoccupied with meetings between the old leaders and the incoming ones, and she has been busy with the preparations for this party. I've caught glimpses of her around, but it's not enough to sate the longing I have for her.

If things were different, she would be here, by my side. It's what my wolf wants the most, but the circumstances won't ever allow us to be together. The most likely outcome is that my father and the pack will disown me or, worse, finish what they started twenty years ago and do away with Alyssa and the rest of the witches.

I'm stuck between wanting her and keeping her safe. My wolf is getting antsy, and I know that very soon, I'll have to make the decision. At the moment, I am leaning toward claiming her. I don't care what the consequences are. I just want her in my arms. Alyssa has taken over my mind and my thoughts. It's driving me crazy, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Even now, in a party full of potential and suitable mates. She's all I can think of. Christ! It's been too long since I saw her. I have to find her before I lose my mind.

As soon as I come down, the chatter dies down. A few people point to me as they whisper among themselves. I could care less about what they think about me. Only Alyssa's opinion matters to me. A couple of creatures block my way, expecting me to stop for conversation. I ignore them, my eyes fixed on the exit.

"There you are," my father obstructs me, placing a hand on my shoulder to stop me.

"I have to be somewhere," I shake off his hold.

“What’s so important that you are disrespecting my guests at your party?”

He makes a good point. I can’t be seen leaving my party, but also no one can know that I’m going to see Alyssa.

“I’m just getting some air,” I make the weak excuse.

“You’ve been missing all night. The least you can do is talk to a few people,” he argues.

“I didn’t ask for all of this.”

“Nonsense,” he waves his hand and gestures for someone behind me to come over, “How else would everyone know that my heir is back.”

I turn and follow his gaze to a group of women who are gawking at me. They shriek excitedly as one of them walks toward us. I can’t believe how times have changed. Normally, my father would be prying me away from the ladies, but now he’s forcing them down my throat.

She is beautiful, but she has nothing on Alyssa, even with the fancy dress and makeup. Alyssa is easily the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever met.

“This is Annabelle. She’s the daughter of Alpha Steven,” my father introduces her.

I have no idea who Alpha Steven is, and from the way my father is glaring at me, I should know who he is talking about. I rack my brain for the name, but I don’t come up with anything, and instead of upsetting them both, I stay quiet.

“Wouldn’t it be great if you two got together?” he asks, filling in the awkward silence.

He means that Annabelle is the perfect mate for me, and I should consider it. I thought he wanted me to find love a few days ago. What happened to that?

She extends her hand, and I take it in a firm handshake. From the way her face falls, I figure she was expecting me to kiss it.

“Nice to meet you,” I say tersely.

“Be nice,” my father whispers before he leaves.

The awkwardness intensifies to the point it becomes painful. Annabelle is smiling at me, and I'm trying to figure out how to get away from my father's watchful eye and a man by his side, who I assume is the said Alpha Steven.

Annabelle starts to talk, and I zone out. I wonder what Alyssa is doing. *Does she miss me as much as I miss her? Is she thinking about me?*

The more I think about her, the more I realize that I don't know much about her except for the fact that she works for my family. I feel terrible for not putting more effort into knowing her. I resolve to find out everything there is to know about her.

I want to know if she has a family. *Do they know her secret? What was her childhood like? What makes her happy?* My thoughts halt for a moment. I didn't realize that I cared this much about her. I've never felt this way about anyone. It's new and exciting.

"Hey!" Annabelle waves a hand in front of me.

"What?" I snap, and it comes out ruder than I intended.

"I was just saying how much I like the city and..."

My attention fades away as my thoughts retract back to my mate. For a minute, I feel sorry for Annabelle for being stuck in a conversation with a distracted and rude person.

My father is still watching us. I know he's listening to our conversation from the disappointed look on his face.

"Do you?" Annabelle asks a little louder, no doubt to catch my attention.

"Yes," I answer absentmindedly, assuming she's asking if I like the city too.

Her mouth starts moving again, but I can't make out any of the words she is saying. Alyssa walks through the door, and I freeze, completely blown away. She looks heavenly with the spotlight on her. Everyone in the room fades away, and for a moment, it's just us in the room. She looks around, her eyes searching the crowd, and then they meet mine. I smirk, and she rolls her eyes dramatically.

My heart does a little flip. *Oh, Lord! How I missed her face.* I catch a whiff of her scent, and a wave of satisfaction rolls over me. She then sees Annabelle and frowns. I watch as the realization sets in her face. I can feel her dismay from where I'm standing, and my wolf hates that I've caused it.

*It's not what it looks like,* I want to yell across the room.

Alyssa looks away and walks to the other side of the room, handing out the skewers on her tray. I should go and explain the situation.

*"Pay attention! Annabelle just asked you a question,"* my father's angry voice booms through the mind link.

Annabelle is looking at me like I'm the biggest letdown in history. I could either stay and redeem myself or I could go to Alyssa and risk her life and mine. My wolf stirs when I choose the former.

It pains me to be so far away from her, but if I want to keep on seeing her. I'm going to have to stay away from her.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" I ask Annabelle while putting on the most charming smile I can muster.

She falls for it right away, "I was asking if you would like to talk somewhere private."

I hate this moment with every fiber of my being. I don't want to go anywhere with her, plus I want to keep my eye on Alyssa.

"How about we get some drinks first?"

A server appears by our side as if on command. I hand Annabelle the flute of mead as my eyes roam around the room, looking for my mate.

Her back is turned to me, but I would recognize her ass from anywhere. She is standing by a couple of young wolves who are ravishing the whole tray. Her shoulders are tense, and I can tell that she is uncomfortable. I wish there was something I could do about freeing her of her duties. She shouldn't have to work at all.

She takes a few steps away from the wolves, and it occurs to me that something is wrong. The wolves grab her arms, making the tray fall.

“I’m sure witches come on the menu too. Don’t be a prude,” one of them says, grabbing her waist and pulling her to his body.

Rage overcomes me, and I sprint across the room in seconds. I don’t care what anyone thinks anymore. No one touches her like that. *She is mine.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

I WATCH IN HORROR as the scene in front of me unfolds. It all happens so fast. One minute, the guy has his hands around my waist, his stinking breath is on my face, and the next, he is thrown off me into a wall with an inhumane force that causes a dent. The guy has no time to recover as James pounces on him and hits his face continuously.

Everyone has stopped to look at what is going on. It's quiet except for the sound of James's fist connecting with the guy's bloody face. The assault goes on for what feels like an eternity, and no one stops James. They are all staring at him as if it's something normal. Even the guy's friend doesn't come to his aid. I think James is going to kill him.

I want to stop him, but I'm still in shock. I don't realize that I'm crying until I taste the saltiness of my tears. I've never seen something so gruesome and brutal. The guy's blood has splattered everywhere, and his body has gone limp. He is either dead, or he has given up on fighting back. I'm hoping for the latter. If he dies, his death will be on me. I could never live with the guilt.

I don't think James will stop anytime soon. I can feel the animalistic rage radiating through him from where I'm standing. I then realize that I'm too close to the scene and people are going to start to question the fight.

I take a few steps backward, stepping on the now scattered skewers. Some of the guests have gone back to the chatter, and the music starts playing again. James stops and gets up from the floor. The front of his formerly crisp white shirt is bloody.

He looks at the beaten-up guy's friend, who scatters away before he faces the same fate as his friend. The guy on the floor twitches, and I let out a relieved sigh. He'll survive. The rest of the onlookers go back to what they were doing as if James hadn't almost murdered someone in front of them.

Someone hands James a cloth, which he uses to wipe the blood from his hands and face. His eyes then find mine, and regret passes through them, but only for a second.

I've never seen him like this. The empty look in his eyes scares me. He looks dangerous and ruthless. Were it not for the severity of the situation, I would have found it sexy, but it has just opened my eyes to what he's capable of. I've let my guard down, and I somewhat stupidly believed that he wouldn't hurt me. I have to start getting used to the fact that I'm not dealing with a mere man, but a monster too.

However, I miss the other person who has been watching me since I walked into the party.

I look around to see if anyone is looking at us. I would hate for someone to figure out that I was the cause. That would be the end of me.

I don't know how to feel about this new side of James that has been revealed to me, but I know that I need some air and a moment to process it all. I walk quickly to the exit, praying and crossing my fingers that James doesn't follow me.

The last thing I want is to draw attention to myself. I bump into a few people on my way out. Most of them hurl insults at me once they realize that I'm a servant. By the time I get to the exit, my eyes are so flooded with tears that blur my vision, so only sharp smudges of the lights and colors appear.

Once I'm outside, I let the tears flow. Another servant walks past me, carrying another tray of skewers. He gives me a sympathetic smile and leaves me to my misery.



The humiliation never stops when you are a servant. I detest the fact that wolves can treat witches the way they like, and nothing will happen to them. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for James for coming to my rescue, but just once, I would like to stand up for myself and show those bastards what witches are made of. If only I knew how to use my powers.

My train of thought is interrupted by a heavy presence behind me.

"Are you okay?" He asks in a cool voice that I can't believe belongs to him after what happened.

I wipe my tears away with the back of my hand, and I manage a nod.

"I'm sorry," he says quietly.

I turn to face him, and my heart breaks. He looks so broken and remorseful. I don't know what he's apologizing for, so I nod again.

"Jesus, Alyssa! Please talk to me."

He takes a few steps closer to me, and I take one back. He closes his eyes and flexes his jaw. When he opens them, they've hardened, and there's not a single emotion in them.

"I don't know what to say, Master James."

"Tell me anything. Say that you are okay."

"I'm okay," I repeat.

I'm a servant, and he is the future alpha with a whole pack of werewolves subjecting to him. Our roles have been clearly defined by what happened tonight. I now realize that it was a mistake to think I could possibly trust him with my secret when he could choose to do whatever he wants at any given time.

"You could have killed him," I add quietly.

"He was touching you," he says coldly.

He's not sorry for it. It makes me wonder what he was apologizing for.

“That doesn’t make it right. Besides, all werewolves act like that. What if someone figures out that you beat a guy to death, and I was involved? Do you know what will happen to me? They’ll find me and make *me* pay. Did you think about that? I don’t think so. All you werewolves care about is proving that you are stronger than the others.”

My hand goes to my mouth when I realize that I’ve just snapped at the future alpha. “I’m sorry. I don’t know what came over me. I shouldn’t have talked to you that way, sir.”

“I’ll never let anything happen to you,” he says softly as he closes the distance between us.

My head tips back as I look into his eyes. How can they change so fast from coldness to sincerity? I want to believe James, but nothing is stopping him from acting the same way he did at the party toward me.

“I don’t know what to say.”

“I promise,” he takes my hands at my sides into his big ones, and warmth floods my heart.

I never thought that holding hands could feel so good. I never want him to let go. A sound at the back of my head is nagging me to question what he has said, but I’m too distracted by the thrill that is running through my body to care.

His right hand leaves mine and lands on my waist. He pulls me to his body, securing me into a tight, protective embrace. Holding hands does not even come close to this. I settle into his frame, ignoring the blood on his shirt. *I can’t believe I’m hugging James Easton. It feels so good, and... What if someone sees us?*

“I’m okay now, sir. You can go back to your party,” I say, withdrawing from the embrace.

“Please, just call me James. Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Yes, many people have been waiting to meet you.”

He gives me a tight-lipped smile and walks back into the party. I suddenly feel a chill when he leaves. If I could have it any other way, I would prefer staying in that embrace all night

long. I don't want him going back to her. I admit that I felt a twinge of jealousy when I saw them together. They looked perfect together. They are perfect for each other, unlike him and I.



“What happened? I heard the commotion. Oh, Lord! You have blood on your face.”

Becky intercepts me as soon as I get to the servants' quarters. Of course, she heard about the fight. Word travels fast around here. Also, I should have washed my face before I came in.

“Oh! A fight broke out.”

Her eyes widen with shock “Who fought?”

“Master James and some other guy.”

I'm aware of how curt my answers are, but I can't look too concerned. I don't want anyone to make the connection between me and the fight.

“What was it about?”

“I don't know,” I shrug, hoping that my face doesn't betray me.

“I'm so tired. I think I'll go to sleep now,” I fake a yawn before she asks more questions.

Becky makes a face while studying mine. I'm not the best at hiding things. It has always been my greatest weakness. I feel like I'm under interrogation, and I'm already starting to sweat.

“Okay,” she finally says.

As soon as I get into my room, I change out of my uniform, looking for blood stains. After scrutiny, I find a couple of spots. I didn't want to clean the uniform for at least another few days because it still has James's scent.

I bury my nose into it, liking the way our scents merge beautifully into one sweet aroma. I take my time, savoring the scents and reliving our hug.

I don't know how much time goes by before I finally get off my bed and walk to the laundry room, where I take one last whiff and throw the uniform into the washer. I can't have anything tying me to whatever has happened tonight.

As I wait for the machine to do its work, I think back to what James said. *Did he mean it? Does that mean that he'll keep my secret? I hope that he wasn't lying to me.* I feel giddy, and I'm already planning our next meeting.

After a much-needed shower and making sure that all the blood stains on my body are gone, I get into bed and relive our moment until I fall asleep.

I dream that I'm running away from an invisible and terrifying force that is chasing me when I bump into James. He holds me, and whatever was chasing me backs away.

"I'm here, Alyssa," he whispers in my ear.

I lean into the mass of muscle. This feels right. I belong here.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

IT HAS BEEN FIVE hours since the incident at my party, and I haven't gone back. The party has died down, most of the guests have left, and the few remaining ones are stumbling around drunkenly. I'm seated on a bench that is directly opposite the servant's quarters, watching out for Alyssa just like I promised. I meant what I said. I won't let anyone hurt my mate. They'll have to go through me first.

I turned off my mind link hours ago after my father kept on pestering me to go back. I think he got the message because no one has come looking for me. I've gotten a few curious looks, from some of the guards, but I don't care. I don't have to explain myself to them. They wouldn't understand how much I care about her.

Over the hours, I've given thought to what Alyssa said. The thought that she has been harassed before and so many times that it has become normal makes me sick to my stomach. It makes me reflect on the past, all the vile things I've done to witches. I'm not a saint. When my mother died, I did foul things out of anger that I'm now deeply ashamed of.

The incident was swept under the rug, and it was decided that we would never talk about it. A few people, including my father's closest friends, got to know what I did, but they gave their word that it would never come to light.

It's unlikely that Alyssa will find out, but if she does, she'll hate me forever, and I'll lose her. I'll do anything to make sure that doesn't happen. My wolf and I are already attached to her. It would break us if she decided she wanted nothing to do with me.

My thoughts are interrupted by a ghostly figure in the distance. It looks like it's floating midair, and it's heading for some guards who are dozing off, oblivious to the person creeping up on them. I recognize the curls of her honey-blond hair. *What the hell is she doing? She'll get herself killed.*

I sprint across the distance and get to her before she reveals herself to the guards. Luckily for us, they are so sleepy that they don't register our presence.

Alyssa is in her nightgown, a blue one this time, but just as flimsy as the other one. Her eyes are closed, but her eyelids are fluttering, almost like she's trying to wake up. Her mouth is moving, but there's no sound coming out. Her body is freezing, so much so that her lips have turned a pale blue color.

"Alyssa!" I try to shake her awake, but she's unresponsive.

It seems like she's in some kind of deep trance. I can count on my fingers the number of times I have panicked in my life, and this moment is definitely in the top three. I don't know what to do with her. I'm afraid of hurting her. She looks so fragile and vulnerable. I don't know if this is a normal occurrence for witches.

However, Alyssa doesn't look like she's in pain, but the way that her body is cold is freaking me out. I should take her somewhere warm. I look back at the servant's house where she came from. All the lights are off, and I don't know her room.

Without a second thought, I take her in my arms and carry her, bridal style toward the mansion. She is light in my arms, and she fits so well, like she was meant to be there. I know she would be upset if she woke up right now, but I don't have a choice. I would never forgive myself if I left her outside at this hour.

I'm just hoping that we don't run into anyone. I don't know how I'll explain a witch passed out in my arms. Fortunately, I make it past the guards at the door, who barely look my way. The house is a mess. There are a couple of guests sprawled around. I heave a sigh of relief when I don't spot anyone on the stairs. We make it to my room without meeting anyone.

I hold Alyssa in one arm as I unlock the door with the other. Just as I'm about to kick the door open, Lance appears out of nowhere. I mutter a string of curses as he makes his way to me. I cradle Alyssa close to my chest, hiding her face from Lance, and hope that she doesn't suffocate.

I have to say that I'm impressed by Lance's stealth. He is certainly sneaky because I didn't hear his heartbeat coming up the stairs.

"Hey, where'd you run off to? I've been meaning to have a word," he slurs, shoving his hands into the front pockets of his jeans.

He sounds drunk, but he doesn't look it. I can't figure out if he's faking it, and if he is, what is the point of pretending?

"Lance, this is not a good time."

I'm worried about Alyssa. The last thing I want is to talk about leadership matters with Lance.

He squints and then laughs dryly. "Oh! Okay. I guess we'll talk in the morning. Have fun, and you too, miss," he does a weird salute thing, and then he goes the opposite way.

I haven't figured Lance out; there's something odd about him that I can't place my finger on, and I hope Alyssa didn't hear that. She's still out cold, but she's mumbling disturbingly. Once I place her on my bed and tuck her in, she relaxes, and her demeanor changes.

She looks peaceful, color has returned to her lips, and she's no longer cold. Something warm unfurls in my chest as I watch her sleeping. She's so precious. I can't believe that she's mine. I want to tell her that, but the fear of rejection has been holding me back.

I would be crushed if things turned out differently. I like her so much that death sounds better than not being with her, and she has no idea about how I feel. I've never been good at expressing my emotions, but for her, I'm willing to try. I don't know how much longer my wolf will put up with my hesitance. It's been dying to mark her.

The reason for my reluctance is that I still have a lot to figure out, given the hostility toward witches in Rivendell. It saddens me that the werewolves would never accept Alyssa as the Luna. I have to find a way to convince them that she's not like other witches.

She's different. Alyssa is selfless, kind, compassionate, and most importantly, she's not greedy for power. I've seen how protective she is of her kind. She would never risk their lives for something so superficial. She is the perfect Luna.

Alyssa stirs in her sleep, pulling on my heartstrings. For years, I've hated witches, and now I'm falling for one. Fate is a funny thing. I'm sure if my mother was alive, she would have loved Alyssa, and she would be so proud of me for finding a mate.

When Alyssa starts snoring lightly, I carry the armchair to the side of the bed and make myself comfortable. I know it's hard to believe that I would sleep on the chair with my raging sex drive. Sleeping next to her would just be wrong. I doze off, content that she is here with me.



“James, wake up!”

Alyssa has been trying to wake me up for the last five minutes. She has gone from gently shaking my shoulder to tapping on my cheek continuously. When she woke up confused, I got the urge to mess with her. I open my eyes just enough to see her but not enough for her to tell I'm awake. It's amusing to watch her expressions.

The taps get more aggressive until I finally give in.

“Good morning, Alyssa.”



She looks so beautiful. Her hair is everywhere, her eyes are the clearest shade of blue I've ever seen, her cheeks are flushed, and her lips are full. She's a walking masterpiece.

"What happened? What am I doing in your bed? How did I get here, James?"

"Okay, one question at a time, please."

She looks at me like I've grown another head overnight. It's hilarious.

"What the hell am I doing in your room?"

"We had a great time last night, and you insisted on sleeping in my room."

"What?"

Her voice gets pitchy, and I break into laughter. The blush in her cheeks intensifies, and when she figures out that I'm joking, fury storms in her eyes.

"This is not funny. How did I end up here?"

She crosses her arms around her chest. She doesn't remember a single thing about last night.

"I brought you here."

"Why?" she yells.

"You were walking around in your nightgown heading for the guards, so I saved you."

"I remember going to bed. How did I get outside?"

She buries her face into her hands and groans.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," she answers too quickly.

She's lying. She knows what happened to her. It breaks my heart that she doesn't trust me enough to confide in me, but that will come in time.

"What time is it? I have to get to work. The others will be looking for me," she adds, looking around for a clock.

I hear the sound of a heartbeat that I've mastered over the years coming toward my room, and I tense up. This is not the right time. He can't find her here.

"You can't leave."

"I'll sneak...wait, what?"

"You can't leave now, Alyssa. Someone's coming."

"Oh, God! What do I do now?" she panics.

"It's my father. I'm sure he won't stay for long. Hide in the closet."

"This is the worst morning ever," she mutters as she goes into the closet.

He has the worst timing. I open the door before he knocks. I intend for us to talk outside, but he makes his way into the room. He looks around, and his nostrils flare as he takes in the scent. I'm screwed. Alyssa's scent is everywhere.

"Who's here? Never mind that. You have some explaining to do."

## CHAPTER NINE

WHAT HAVE I GOTTEN myself into? I just woke up in James's bed, and now I'm in his closet, hiding from his father. It feels unreal. A week ago, my life was boring, and nothing interesting ever happened to me, but after I met James, things have been happening a little too fast for my liking, and if everything else goes on like this, I swear I'm going to lose my mind.

I don't know how we went from hating each other's guts to him being protective over me and now, ending up in his bed in such a short time. I don't even want to get into the feelings. I detested James a few days ago, but I'm not sure if I do anymore.

Admitting that I like him sounds too scary and risqué. I know it's stupid and irresponsible of me to have feelings for James. I've already established the fact that we can't be together. He just makes me feel safe. I've said it in my head at least a hundred times, and each time I find myself thinking about how much I like him. Once he finds his mate and makes her his Luna, I'll end up getting hurt.

I have to find a way to deal with my feelings before they get out of hand. I need to start by keeping my distance and not finding myself in situations where we are alone. That includes not waking up in his bed, no matter how good and comfortable it feels. It's going to be challenging to clean his room without

being tempted to experience how safe and exhilarating it is to be wrapped around his scent.

I know I don't have the best self-control, but it can't be that hard to resist jumping into his bed or jumping into it with him.

Secondly, I have to establish some boundaries between us. The sexual tension is soaring at dangerous levels, and it's only a matter of time before we act on it. I've thought about it a couple of times, and I'm sad that I won't get to compare the real thing to my fantasies. This is going to be the toughest. James is irresistible, and I don't know if the yearning in my body will ever stop.

Lastly, James needs to stop being nice to me. It was easier hating him when he was a jerk to me. This new side of him is nearly impossible to hate when he's being protective and caring. Let's go back to when we hated each other. It was less complicated back then.

I am determined to make this work. I can't be hiding in closets forever. It's already embarrassing as it is. His father knows I'm here. I can't imagine the scandal if he finds me. James would get a slap on his hand, and I would be sentenced to death and forgotten about.

I blame my powers for everything that has happened. If it weren't for the blackouts, I wouldn't have met him or slept in his bed. I have to get a grip on the blackouts. The rate at which they are happening is alarming.

The vision in the wheat fields was the scariest one yet. The voices have been haunting me in my dreams, and it has gotten progressively worse that I still hear them at random times. They keep on repeating the same words over and over again, and I've gotten used to it at this point. I still have no idea how to avenge them or who they are referring to.

I want to assume that the voices mean the werewolves, but they have to be specific. I can't fight against hundreds of them alone, and besides, not all of them are evil. James is exempt from that category. He might look scary, but I don't think he would do something to make a group of spirits that mad.

Ugh! This is overwhelming. With everything that has been happening in my life lately, I feel like I need a break. A few days of peace to clear my head and not to worry about falling for a man I can never have or the strange things happening to me.

From the closet, I hear James's father's footsteps drawing closer to the door. Hiding from a werewolf is pointless because he can hear my heartbeat and labored breathing anyway.

"Last night was a shit show. You caused a scene and ran away," he says as he walks away from the door.

"I'm aware of that," James answers coldly.

I've never given thought to James's relationship with his father. From his tone, I assume that it's not that great. I can imagine him on the other side of the door, stone-faced and with that deathly glare.

If his father is affected by his coldness, he doesn't let on.

"Good thing that Annabelle liked you, and she agreed to see you again."

*Who's Annabelle?*

"Alpha Steven and I have already struck a deal. Annabelle will be your mate," he adds, answering my question.

I feel like I've been struck across the face hard. My mouth dries up, and the air gets caught in my throat, depriving my lungs of oxygen. It feels like I'm drowning. *Does he have a mate? When was he planning to let me know?* I feel betrayed and angry. I should have known he was leading me on all this time. He could never be with someone like me.

I hold my breath as I wait for James to confirm my fears. The seconds tick by slowly, and then they turn into a minute. My heart shatters when I realize that the answer I'm waiting for will never come.

"Please get rid of that young lady. You now have a mate. Act like it."

The door slams as his father leaves. From the closet, my faith in James also exits. I'm not even flustered that his father knew

I was there. I feel numb.

“Alyssa,” James knocks on the door, and I hold back my tears.

I can’t let him see me like this. I swallow the hard and painful knot in my throat, and I walk out, avoiding his gaze. I just know if I look at him, the tears will come.

“No, wait. He’s still out there,” James says when I head for the door.

I wrap my arms around myself and bite the inside of my cheek to distract me from the emotions that are flowing through my body. A small part of me is still holding out hope that he will explain himself. His face is expressionless. It’s unnerving not to know what he’s thinking about.

“I wanted to talk to you about your trances.”

He walks past me and sits on the armchair beside his bed. I catch a whiff of his scent, and my heart squeezes.

“Why?” I ask bitterly.

I guess we are not going to talk about what happened. He’s so good at pretending. I can do that, too.

“I want to know how often they occur.”

“Why?” I ask again.

This is the last thing I want to talk about.

“Last night, you almost exposed yourself. I want to know so that I can be there to prevent that.”

I chuckle. He has some nerve to pretend to care about me when his father just announced that he has a mate.

“Why do you care?”

“I want to help.”

I get a sinking feeling in my stomach. I don’t know why I expected a different answer. The whole nonchalant mood he has going on is making me question everything. Did I read too much into what was going on between us? Was it one-sided? The tension, the flirting, the feelings, all of it?

I think back to our interactions. James has never expressed his attraction to me. I, on the other hand, have been drooling over him like a love-struck fool.

“I promised I won’t let anything happen to you,” he adds as if it will make his answer better.

*How do you plan to do that when you are preoccupied with your mate?* I want to ask, but I hold back. I don’t want to look bitter. He sounds so sincere, like all those times I believed him when he was toying with me.

“Yeah, right,” I mutter under my breath.

“How frequently do they happen?”

The raw command in his voice, the utter dominance, and power, shake me to the core, and I give in.

“I only started getting them a few months ago, but they’ve become more frequent,” I answer in a small voice.

I hate myself for submitting to him that way.

“Do you know what triggers them?”

“No.”

The blackouts vary. Sometimes, they are vivid, and I remember everything that happened in the morning and other times, I wake up blank, like last night. I have no recollection of getting out of bed.

“I think I know how I can help you,” he says as he gets up from the chair and walks to me.

I take a few steps backward until my back is against the door. I’ll be damned if I fall for his games again. This time, I’m prepared.

“What do you even know about magic?”

“There are books in this house about it. I’ll find them, and then we’ll figure out how to stop the trances.”

It’s amusing how he says ‘we’, implying that we will be seeing each other when I don’t even plan on it, and now that I’m thinking about it, why am I allowing him to dictate what I

should do with my powers? What if he has a plan to take them away? I wouldn't be surprised.

His kind already did it. I don't know why I keep on expecting something different from him.

"No," I say firmly.

"What?"

His perfectly arched brow goes up.

"I don't want to do anything about my visions. I'm okay with having them and you have no power to say what I do with them. You can report me to the other wolves for all I care. You are not going to take anything more from me."

My chest burns with newfound determination and courage. I don't know why I thought I could trust a werewolf in the first place.

"Alyssa, I'm trying to help you," he says softly, but I don't fall for it.

I don't want your help," I snap angrily.

A flash of hurt crosses his eyes, and for a brief second, my heart breaks a little.



## CHAPTER TEN

I THOUGHT I WOULD feel better after telling off James, but I feel worse. I can't get the image of hurt in his eyes out of my head. I might have been a little too harsh. I contemplated going back to apologize, but the small voice in the back of my head kept on reminding me how he had utter disregard for my feelings when he was leading me on. It's only fair that he feels as terrible as I feel, and it's probably for the best.

He is off-limits now that he has a mate. I have to move on and think about things that matter, like my powers and the witches. I feel horrible for neglecting my friends and lying to them just because I thought I had something special with James. Good thing I cut it off before it became something too serious.

Sneaking out of the mansion in my nightgown turns out to be one of the hardest things I've ever done. I am sweating, panicking, and trying to be inconspicuous, all the while getting out of there as fast as I can. Luckily for me, most of the guests are still sleeping off the alcohol, the servants are busy in the kitchen, and the guards are changing their shifts, so their posts are empty.

I make it to the shared quarters in one piece. The guilt sets in once I step inside. I put everyone's lives at risk by sneaking around. If I had been caught, the werewolves would have assumed that we were planning something, and I'm not sure that James would come to my rescue.

I tiptoe to my room, which is at the end of the hallway of the six-bedroom house, avoiding the creaky parts of the floorboard. A six-bedroom house sounds big, but I assure you that it's not. There's a kitchenette, a small living room, a laundry room, three bathrooms, and cramped bedrooms, which are divided among the servants. The men get the downstairs rooms while the women take up the upstairs. The space is barely enough for all the forty-something people that live here.

My room, which was formerly a closet, is at the end of the hallway. I am lucky to have some space to myself, no matter how small it is.

"Where have you been? We have been looking for you everywhere," Becky calls out just as I am almost to the door.

I turn to face her, guilt-stricken and regretful of my actions. I should probably tell her the truth, but this is not the time or place. The walls are thinner here.

"I went for a walk," I lie miserably.

Becky's eyebrows go up as she looks at my choice of dressing. "You went for a walk all night?"

I am officially the worst person on earth.

"I...I did?" Apprehension strains my voice, making it faint.

"Really?" She scoffs.

"You have been acting strange lately, Alyssa."

I want to tell her everything, but as soon as I open my mouth, words fail me.

"Anyway, Maggie has been sick all night, and she has been asking for you."

My heart sinks to my stomach. I don't think I could feel any worse. Instead of being there for someone who raised me, I was sleeping comfortably in James's bed. I feel like I've failed everyone, and this is not my day.

"What's wrong?"

I now notice Becky's sullen face, her puffy eyes, and the redness on the tip of her nose. I was wrong about feeling

worse. My heart sinks lower and completely shatters.

“It’s not looking good,” Becky says as she wipes her tears with the back of her hand.

“Where is she?”

She points to the living room, and I run past her, my pulse throbbing in my temples. At my first glance at Maggie, my brain refuses to acknowledge that it’s the same bubbly woman I’ve known all my life.

She looks so tiny and fragile lying on the couch with a heavy blanket that completely swallows her. Her body is so still that for a moment, I think that she’s dead, only for her chest to rise slowly in a labored breath that sounds so bad.

Her face is pale and unrecognizable. Her eyes have sunk into their sockets, and her normally round and full cheeks are just skin and bone. A wheezing sound is coming from her lips, which are dry and chapped. She is dying. I don’t know how, but I can smell it around her.

“Maggie,” I call out softly as I kneel and take her bony hand into mine.

She’s cold despite the heat in the room and the blanket covering her. She stirs as her eyes open slowly. The green eyes that were once full of life are now empty. My tears fall uncontrollably as she squeezes my hand.

We have never really understood what was wrong with Maggie’s health. One day, she would be okay, and the next, she would be on her deathbed. Yesterday, when I checked on her, she was healthy, and it looked like she was going to recover. Had I known that she would be this way, I would not have left her side.

“How long has she been like this?” I ask Becky, who’s crying softly on the other couch in the room.

“All night. She was delirious, and she was saying all sorts of things, and then everything went downhill from there. She hasn’t spoken since except to ask for you occasionally.

“Alyssa,” Maggie’s voice, strained and barely a whisper, calls out.

“I’m here,” I say, warming up her hand between mine.

“They are here,” she says, and Becky rushes to kneel beside me.

“What is she talking about?”

She shrugs, “I don’t know. That’s the most she has spoken.”

“They are here,” Maggie repeats, her voice getting shrill.

“Who’s here, Maggie?”

Her eyes snap closed, and her fingers tighten around my hand. She stops breathing for a minute. Becky and I look at each other, stunned.

“Maggie,” I shake her lightly.

Suddenly, her mouth opens, and the wheezing sound returns.

*“Ulciscor specialis.”*

That isn’t Maggie’s voice. It sounds like a collection of a dozen voices speaking together at the same time. It’s the same voices that have been haunting me.

“Oh, my God! What is happening?” Becky panics.

I wish I could explain to her, but I don’t know what to make of the situation. I feel helpless.

“What do we do?”

“I don’t know,” I answer quietly.

In the fields, my scream stopped the voices, but Maggie is in no position to scream. I recall how painful it felt, and my heart bleeds for her. I wish there was someone else with more experience with magic. I’m just a rookie, and most of the time, I never know what I’m doing.

The only way I can think to help Maggie is to relieve her pain. I rush to the kitchen and open the cabinets, hoping that I’ll find what I’m looking for. It’s been at least six years since I last saw the old jar. I hope no one threw it out.

*“Ulciscor specialis,”* Maggie repeats, her voice getting shriller.

“What are you looking for?” Becky follows me to the kitchen, no doubt frightened by the sounds Maggie is making.

I reach the far end of the cabinet, and I find it, a black jar covered in dust.

“This,” I smile triumphantly.

The jar contains dried Feverfew, an herb that Maggie and I collected years ago and used to cure the acute migraines I had back then. The herb was a miracle worker. It relieved my pain in minutes. I was in awe that such a pretty flower could cure me so fast.

I hope that it will work for Maggie as well.

“What is that?” Becky wrinkles her nose.

“It will help to calm her down,” I say as I grab a bowl and fill it with water.

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Yes, help me hold her down.”

I pour the yellowed petals into the bowl of water and stir. The water quickly changes to a pale-yellow color as the bittersweet aroma of the herb fills the room.

“Hold her hands,” I instruct Becky.

The first attempt to get Maggie to drink the brew fails. For a dying person, she has a lot of strength. She knocks the bowl right out of my hands. The second and third attempt doesn’t go so well either. By the fourth time, all of us are drenched.

Maggie doesn’t want to drink it. However, during the struggle, the voices have quieted, and now she’s mouthing the words.

“What do we do now, Alyssa?”

Maggie’s pulse is becoming weaker by the minute. If we don’t act, she’s not going to make it, and since she wants nothing to do with herbs, we will have to get creative. I’ll have to

summon my powers. There must be a healing spell somewhere deep inside my head.

The only problem is that normally, spells just come to me. I've never had to search for them. I close my eyes and imagine chanting a spell. However, I can't seem to concentrate because Maggie is slipping away fast.

"Alyssa, she's dying," Becky cries out.

"Hold on, Maggie, I can fix this," I say through my tears.

Maggie's hands stiffen, she sighs, and her pulse stops completely. We watch in horror as she dies right in front of our eyes.

I lay my head on her chest, hoping to hear that faint heartbeat again, but it doesn't come. I don't know how long I stay like that. Becky tries to pry me off her body a couple of times, but I still hold on, waiting for her to come back.

"Alyssa," Becky puts a hand on my shoulder.

"She's gone, Alyssa."

Everything happens so fast as something overcomes me. A strong wind bursts through the windows, breaking them in the process. It circles me, still lying on Maggie, destroying everything in its path. Becky is yelling over the roaring sound right next to me, but I can't hear what she's saying.

I'm sure that the wind is my doing. However, I don't know how to control it. It's spiraling through the house, and if I don't stop it, it's going to bring the whole house down. I panic and lift my head as it escalates.

"Alyssa! Stop. Someone's coming!" Becky yells at the top of her lungs.

Everything quiets down suddenly.

"The Beta is close," she whispers.

This time, my heart truly stops.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

“WHERE ARE YOU GOING, Lance?”

He halts, and his shoulders tighten before he turns to face me. I bet he wasn't expecting me to sneak up on him. I can see the surprise in his features even though he's trying so hard to hide it.

“I thought I heard something, and I was going to check it out,” he says through his teeth.

“In the servants' quarters?” I ask as I look over his shoulder.

His jaw ticks a couple of times. He knows that I'm stalling him. Annoyance is already starting to show on his face. He will soon break character, and I cannot wait for it.

“Yes.”

“What did it sound like?” I feign concern.

A vein appears on his forehead. He is furious.

“Why don't we go and check it out?”

If I go any further, my ears will start to bleed. The ringing in them is getting louder by the second, and it hurts like hell.

“There's no need for that, Lance. If something is going on, the guard will deal with it. You are the future Beta. You shouldn't concern yourself with speculations. Come on, you said that you wanted to have a chat with me. Let's do that now,” I grab

his shoulder and squeeze it with all my strength while giving him a fake smile.

I can see the hesitance in his eyes. He's angry, but he also doesn't want to disobey me. The wheels are turning in his head as he searches for an excuse, but before he can make one, I lead him in the opposite direction, away from whatever is happening in that house.

From the corner of my eye, I see a whirlwind in the house. I just hope that Alyssa is okay. It was by sheer luck that I felt her magic when I was in my room. I was intrigued because it felt different from the first time she used her magic on me. This one felt like it was tainted with something dark, and it was more powerful.

I followed the trail even though it hurt my ears so bad, and I'm glad I did. Lance would have gotten there before me. Thank heavens I interceded at the right time.

"So, what did you want to talk to me about?"

"What?" Lance asks, confusion evident on his face.

I know his mind is still stuck on what is happening in the quarters. I hope I can distract him enough to forget about it.

"Wait, don't tell me yet. I know the perfect drink for such conversations," I say eagerly.

Lance gives me an angry stare, and I resist the urge to laugh. I walk with him to the library, which also serves as a mini-study. From here, I can see the servant's quarters clearly. The good thing about my father is that almost every room in the house is stocked with his favorite drink.

I pour us three fingers of the mead and gesture for him to take a seat. I sip on the mead, savoring the woody taste in my mouth. The last thing I want to do is get drunk, but it's a good way to keep my nerves in check, especially now that they are all over the place because I'm worried about Alyssa. The ringing has grown faint now that I'm not near her.

"Drink up," I say to Lance, who's swirling the drink in his glass.



He takes a few sips, and I smile in satisfaction. “Now, tell me what you wanted to talk about.”

As Lance talks, I realize that he never had anything to talk to me about in the first place. It makes me wonder what his motive was. He talks about the plans for the pack and the new leadership. These are things that we have already discussed in meetings. I’m getting annoyed and impatient.

When I look out the window, the servant’s quarters seem calmer now, and even though the ringing has stopped, I can’t let Lance go until I make sure Alyssa is okay.

“That’s very insightful,” I say, not bothering to hide my boredom.

“I want you to do something for me.”

“What is it?”

“Do you remember Alpha Steven from my party?”

“Yes.”

His patience is running thin, and I’m intentionally stretching everything out. I tell him about how I was talking to Annabelle at the party. I give him a lengthy description of how beautiful she was. I make a big point about how she is my mate, and I can’t wait to have her here in Rivendell. When he looks like he’s going to punch me, I go in for the kill.

I exaggerate about how I wronged Annabelle and her father. I tell him I want to gift her a car and order him to drive at least forty-five miles to deliver it to her. Seeing how he struggles with the right words to say to me is amusing. He’ll freak out once he realizes everything I’ve told him is a lie.

He finally agrees, defeated, and I smile satisfactorily.

Once he leaves, I rush to Alyssa. The damage is visible from the outside. The house looks like it’s going to fall any minute now. There are all kinds of broken things at the door and in the small hallway. I single out Alyssa’s heartbeat from the other two in the house.

In what I assume is the living room, nothing is where it’s supposed to be. It looks like a tornado passed through it.

Alyssa is seated on the floor by the couch. There's the brunette I recognize from seeing her around Alyssa and a man who's assessing the damage.

I clear my throat, announcing my intrusion. The brunette and the man are shocked to see me, but Alyssa doesn't move. The man excuses himself, and the brunette looks around, avoiding my gaze.

"Uhm, what can I do for you, Mr. Easton?"

Alyssa finally looks up, gives me a blank look, and looks back down. Her face is solemn, tear-streaked and her eyes are swollen.

"Leave us," I say to the other servant.

She looks between me and Alyssa waiting for some sort of confirmation from her friend. Alyssa waves her away, and she leaves, but not before giving me a suspicious look.

"What happened?" I ask once we are alone.

Alyssa points to the lump on the couch covered with a blanket. I have a feeling she won't explain, so I take a peek. Beneath the blanket is a dead woman who looks a little too familiar. I recognize her as Maggie. She has been working here since I was a child.

"I couldn't save her," Alyssa sobs.

Her sobs break my heart, and I kneel beside her and pull her to my chest. Her cries get louder, and I hold her tighter. Maggie is somehow important to Alyssa. A memory flashes of Maggie taking care of a blonde curly-haired toddler. It pains me that she's hurting, and there's nothing I can do to take away the pain.

She clings on to me until her sobs die down.

"I need your help," she says, wiping the rest of her tears.

"Whatever you need, I'm here, Alyssa."

She gets up, wiping off the dust that has settled on her dress.

"Get me those books."

I recall our conversation this morning. Her words stung, but I don't hold it against her. She had every right to be angry with me. I regret that I didn't say anything when my father told me about Annabelle. I want to explain myself to her, but I don't think now is the right time.

"Okay. What else do you need?"

She chews on her bottom lips for a second, and then she releases it. I know I'm a jerk for even thinking about it, but I can't help it. Her lips are so sexy. I wish I could kiss her.

"Nothing."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," she gives me a tight-lipped smile.

"Do you need help?" I say, referring to the body on the couch.

"No, Becky will help me."

I assume she's talking about the brunette. I want to help, but I know she won't let me. There's something different about her. There's a coldness in her eyes that did not exist before. I'm trying not to overthink that it is directed at me.

"Alyssa, I..."

"Don't," she interrupts me, "I don't want to talk about it ever. Just get me the books if you want to help me so bad."

Her words cut like glass right through my heart. It feels like I've already lost her. She wants nothing to do with me.

"Okay. Should I bring them here?"

"No," she says quickly, slashing my heart even more.

"I'll meet you at midnight in the basement kitchen."

"Okay."

She feels so distant, and I made her that way. I wish I could go back in time and change everything that happened this morning. I should have proudly introduced her to my father as my mate and stood by her no matter what happened. Alternatively, I should have said something about Annabelle.

I feel miserable. It's unlike any pain I've ever felt in my life. Leaving her there, knowing that she is hurting, takes all my strength. I want to stay and hold her until she feels better or do whatever she wants. I just want to be next to her. That's enough for me, but I've messed it all up.

I go straight to the library and drown my sorrows in the mead. It doesn't help. It only makes things worse. I can't stop thinking about her. To distract myself, I go searching for the books I promised. For creatures who can't do magic, the Easton's library is full of magic material dating back to the 1400s.

I search thousands of books, looking for the specific ones that will help Alyssa. In the collection, I find one titled *The Malleus Maleficarum*. It gives the history of witches in great length. I think Alyssa would like it since I'm aware the history of her lineage was erased. She would be glad to know where she came from.

The second book that I find is *The Magus*, a guide for occult and ceremonial magic. The last one is *The Discouerie of Witchcraft*. It has all kinds of signs and sigils.

I hope that they will make her happy. I know she won't forgive me just because I give her a bunch of books. I'll have to work for her forgiveness. Midnight is so far away. I can't wait to see her. I'll tell her how much she means to me and that she's my mate. I've waited for too long. It's time.

I have to win her back, and I have to do it right this time.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

I HAD NO IDEA that this room existed. It's a wonder I didn't discover it during my childhood, but then again, it must have been used for something different back in the day. It's so secluded and the best place to meet someone secretly. I'm guessing that it's also soundproof. The witches use it as their break room, although it looks more like a kitchen.

Until today, I never thought about the servant's quarters. I'm ashamed to say that I never cared for the servants growing up, but after what I saw today, I can't believe they have been living in such horrible conditions when the mansion has dozens of unused rooms. It's unfair to be cramped in such a small space. Generally, the witches have been treated poorly for years.

I know that building a new house for them wouldn't even make a dent in my father's wealth, but he's too stubborn and filled with hate to give them better houses. When my mother died, he vowed to do everything in his power to ensure that the witches suffer.

He has been doing that for far too long, and as soon as I'm crowned as the alpha, I'll make a few changes. No one should have to suffer that much for the mistakes of people who are long dead. Surprisingly, over the last couple of days, my anger and hatred for witches has melted away; something I never thought would be possible.

I've done some self-reflection, and I've concluded that my mother would have wanted me to make peace with them. She was selfless like that.

Alyssa has also contributed to the change, although she doesn't know it. She has restored my trust in witches. She's the only one I know to still have power, and she hasn't caused any harm to anyone and only wants to protect her people. I now understand that just because the witches at that time were evil, doesn't mean that the rest of them are the same.

I've been waiting for Alyssa since ten. To say that I'm eager to see her would be an understatement. This is the night I tell her everything, and I'm so nervous. I've been pacing the room, thinking about the right words to tell her. The two-hour wait feels like a lifetime.

A few minutes after the clock strikes midnight, Alyssa joins me. Her face is blank, and for the first time since I met her, I can't tell what she's feeling. Her hair is wet and slicked back into a low ponytail. The scent of her lavender shampoo fills the room, and I resist the urge to pull her into my arms and take it in. I can tell she's been crying again from the way her cheeks and the tip of her nose are slightly red.

Maggie's death has affected her so much. I wish she'd let me comfort her as she tells me all about Maggie.

"Where are they?" she asks icily.

I was expecting some conversation, but it looks like she's not up for it. I hand her the books and watch as her eyes skim over them.

"There were more, but I thought that these would help. I can get more if you like."

I'm rambling, and it's the most out-of-character thing I've ever experienced. Alyssa looks up from the books and looks at me with an unreadable expression.

"I'll let you know if I want more."

She starts to leave, but I grab her arm.

“Alyssa, I know this is not the right time, but I wanted to talk to you.”

She turns to face me, and she gently gets out of my grip. “Go on.”

My mouth suddenly feels like it’s full of sand. I didn’t expect her to give in so easily after our earlier conversation.

“I’m sorry about what happened this morning.”

So much has happened since then that it seems like a long time ago. She watches me, her face unmoving and her scrutinizing gaze adding to my nervousness.

“Annabelle is not my mate. I just didn’t want to start an argument with my father and keep you waiting that long. You were going to be late for your duties, and I didn’t want you to get in trouble.”

Her eyebrows dip as she thinks about my words. After a while, her lips widen into a bitter smile.

“Is that all?” she asks sarcastically.

*You are my mate*, the words are on the tip of my tongue, but I hold back. I have a feeling she won’t believe me. I’ll have to try another way to show her I mean everything I say. Words are not enough to express what I feel.

Her eyes soften for a second and then go back to being icy. When I shake my head, she sighs as if she was expecting that, and then she leaves and takes my heart with her.



I’m trying so hard not to think about him, but I’ve been rereading the same sentence over and over again for about an hour now. The words have long lost meaning, and I’ve forgotten what I’m reading about.

James should be the least of my worries, at the moment. I have so much on my plate. I have to get through these books and fix my friendship with Becky since she hasn’t talked to me since James came into the house, and someone has to oversee Maggie’s burial ritual.

Of all those things I have to do, I've only accomplished one task. I've managed to read about the history of witches and their origin. Whatever my kind has gone through under the Easton's is not something new.

Witches have been going through every imaginable thing on earth for so many years. They have been tortured, burned alive on stakes, and cast away from society. This new knowledge makes me feel better that we are not the only generation going through this. However, it makes me furious that we have endured so much.

Once I know everything there is to magic, I vow to educate everyone. We must take back our power.

Speaking of powers, Becky is still furious with me for hiding my powers from her. She has been avoiding and ignoring me no matter how hard I try to talk to her. I know that I deserve it, but I need her. There's too much going on for us to be this divided.

Everyone has been solemn since they found out Maggie passed on. I've been thinking about the words she kept on repeating. Something sinister must have happened for those witches to seek out revenge in the ways they are. I wish there was a way to know what happened, but the chances are getting slim. The only person I knew who could have possibly known about the witches back then is dead.

Normally, death isn't that big of a deal because we believe that the spirit lingers around and comes back to life through another creature, but everyone has felt Maggie's absence.

She brought up most of us, and for some of them, it's like losing their parents all over again. We have decided to hold a small ceremony to send her off tonight. I don't know if I'm ready for it. I feel so alone with the grief weighing me down. It makes me wish for James's touch.

Having him here with me would solve half of my problems, but whatever we had going on between us is over. On the other hand, his explanation made sense, but I felt it wasn't complete. He said Annabelle wasn't his mate, but his father explained



that the deal was sealed. He also didn't mention if he liked me or not.

I wish he would tell me how he felt.

Someone knocks gently on my door, bringing me out of my thoughts. "It's time," they say through the door.

Since no one knows how to perform burial rites, we thought we would hold a small ceremony to remember Maggie, talk about favorite things, and say a prayer. I wish we knew how to do it right. She doesn't deserve an amateur burial.

"Becky!" I call out once I see her. She looks back at me and then ignores me. I don't think my heart can break anymore. The pieces are too shattered and tiny.

We all head toward the forest where the ceremony will take place, courtesy of James. If it weren't for him, I don't think we would ever be allowed to bury her. James somehow managed to convince wolves who have hated us for years to let us be for this one night.

We head to a clearing where we lay Maggie's body, covered in her favorite blanket. Everyone has carried something that reminds them of her. I have a bunch of wildflowers, and Becky has a couple of things with her, including a blanket that she knitted.

The oldest man in the group, Roy, leads the ceremony. He starts by talking about how great Maggie was. He then calls up people who wish to say a word. Everyone has something nice to say about Maggie. She was the parent most of us never had.

After that, he leads us in prayer, and our grim voices join him.

"Mother of us all, gather us in your arms. You, who knows the grief of losing a loved one, send us comfort and guidance."

We chant the prayer for a few minutes, and then the most magical thing happens. Flowers of all kinds grow from Maggie's body and bloom around her. Everyone gasps and looks around in surprise. Nothing like this has ever happened when we've had to bury one of our own. Her body fuses with the earth until there's just a bed of flowers where her body lies.

The magical moment changes everyone's mood. We all now know that she has safely passed on to join the others before her. We stay for a while, admiring the flowers before people start leaving.

Becky comes up to me, holding a silver chain with a Celtic cross pendant, and throws it into my hands.

"She would have wanted you to have this," she says, giving me a thin-lipped smile.

I know we are far from going back to how we were, but this is a start. I'll fix everything, and from now on, I'll be honest. That starts with dealing with the situation with James. I'll feel better if we talk it out. He means well, and I would hate to lose a friendship because I can't get over a stupid crush.

Even as I think about it, I know I'm lying to myself. Crushes don't feel this intense. I think that I might be falling for James.

As soon as the thought occurs to me, I see familiar silver eyes lurking in the shadows. My heart does a little flip, and comfort washes over me.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

NO MATTER HOW HARD I tried, I couldn't stay away from Alyssa, knowing how important tonight was for her. I simply couldn't bear the thought of her being alone. I had to be there for her even if it meant lurking in the bushes like some weird stalker, which I must say has been very unbecoming of me.

In my defense, it was the only way I could get that close to her without drawing attention to myself or disrupting the ceremony. Plus, I don't think the witches would appreciate my presence in such an intimate ceremony.

When I saw how distressed Alyssa was when I gave her the books, I knew I had to do something to help even though she clearly stated that she didn't want any help from me. I couldn't convince my father to let the witches have a night off to have the ceremony, so I got new help to replace them for the night. He wouldn't know the difference unless someone told him.

However, I couldn't care less about the consequences right now. I'll deal with his wrath later. The planning was the hardest part since all the servants I tried to talk to thought I was setting them up for something. The brunette, Becky, was the only one who was willing to talk to me, and we planned the whole thing, although she gave me a couple of dirty looks at first.

The ceremony was lovely, even with the grief hanging over them. It was evident how much Maggie was treasured. It took me back to when my mother died. Everything that happened from then till now has always been a one-sided story. No one cared for the other side.

With this new side of witches that has been revealed to me, I've been thinking about what the witches were demanding. Back then, it didn't make sense because werewolves were the superior creatures and the natural choice for rulers. The species had no representatives among them, as they all reported to the Alpha. When the witches pointed that out, everyone thought they wanted all that power for themselves, but now I'm thinking about it, I don't think that was the case.

I don't know what happened that night when my mother was murdered, but the witches made a good point. It doesn't make sense for the creatures to be ruled by one person. It would be better if there were leaders within the species who report to the Alpha.

Everything could have been avoided if the werewolves weren't so obsessed with power. They were the true villains of the story, and in addition to the oppression of creatures, they murdered hundreds of witches for wanting to make things better.

I regret that I was part of it. I shouldn't have taken matters into my own hands and caused that kind of pain. The events still haunt me to date. I had just watched my mother's body burn into ashes, and I was outraged. I couldn't fathom the fact that the witches lived after what they had done, and I was determined to make them pay.

I'm not proud of what happened next. From eavesdropping on my father's conversations, I knew that most witches had fled and were hiding somewhere out of town. I devised a plan that guaranteed what I wanted the most.

I found where the witches were hiding before my father got to them. It was an old, abandoned farmhouse that stood in the middle of a wheat field. They were bundled up in the house, unaware of what was about to happen.

All it took was some gasoline and a strike of the match, and then everything was up in flames. It took the witches some time to realize what was going on, and by then, it was too late. I remember their screams over the roaring fire as I watched from a distance.

My father found me, but there was nothing he could do to save them. I was whisked away from the scene, and we never spoke about it again. When I was sent away to the city, I saw that the house had been burned to the ground. Back then, I felt like I had done the right thing.

I was so blinded by the pain that I didn't stop to think that other kids had lost their families, and their loss was as heavy as mine. I realize how wrong and twisted it was. I can't bring them back. The least I can do now is change things for witches as soon as I'm crowned Alpha.

I am drawn back to the ceremony when the group starts chanting a prayer. I watch in awe as Maggie's body turns into a flowerbed. This is the kind of burial all witches killed all those years ago deserved.

Everyone leaves shortly after that, and Alyssa is left behind. She sees me and gives me a small smile. I can't even begin to express all the things I want to do. I've waited far too long to tell her how I feel, but I don't want to make tonight about me.



James's wolf emerges from the shadows and walks toward me. It stops a few steps away, waiting for me to give it the go-ahead. I reach out my hand, and it comes closer, allowing me to touch its head. My hand gets buried in the soft fur, and it leans slightly on me.

I think back to the first time we met and how scared I was. If anyone told me that in a week, I'd be petting the same wolf, I would have laughed in their faces. It makes a deep rumbling sound as I scratch the back of its ear, making me chuckle.

The wolf then sits beside me and lays its head on my lap. I run my hand through its fur, absentmindedly thinking about how good it feels to have him here. I'm happy he came despite my

coldness to him, and I know I had the whole plan to stay away from him, but tonight, I don't care about that.



“Alyssa! Wake up,” James shakes me awake.

I yawn as I rub the sleep out of my eyes. We are in the forest, and it's still dark. I stretch my back, which hurts from leaning on the tree trunk for too long.

“What time is it?” I ask James as my eyes adjust to the darkness.

My jaw drops once I see him. He is stark naked, and I can see everything. My eyes roam hungrily over his body, lingering on the parts I haven't seen before. It's such a glorious sight to wake up to.

“You are naked,” I point out the obvious.

He chuckles, “I didn't have anything to cover myself up with.”

“Oh!”

*How is he so confident in his nakedness?* I think to myself, but then again, if I had a gorgeous body like his, I would be flaunting it around.

“It's getting cold outside. I wanted to wake you up so that you can go to bed,” he says, but I don't hear a word. I'm still staring. Those are some powerful legs.

“Alyssa!”

“Okay, I have...to go to sleep. Bye.”

Awkwardness sets in, and I take one last look before I turn around and follow the path back to the house. James follows closely behind me, and I trip a couple of times. As it turns out, it's very difficult to walk when a hot and naked man is behind you.

Luckily for me, we made it out of the forest without my ankles breaking off. James transforms back into his wolf and walks me to the door. At the door, he nudges me with his snout, I scratch the back of his ears, and then he leaves.

I feel a pang of sadness as I watch him leave. Tonight, no words were said between us, but it felt more special than any other interaction we have ever had. It was just us, our differences, and reservations aside. However, it pains me to think that tomorrow, everything will go back to normal. On the bright side, I now have to clear image to add to my fantasies.

I lean against the door, beaming as I recall the image of his body. It took everything in me not to touch him.

As I walk to my room, I see Becky waiting for me, her arms crossed around her chest and her expression forlorn.

“Hi,” I mumble.

“We have to talk,” she says sternly.

“Sure,” I say as I usher her into my room.

She chooses to sit on the furthest edge of the bed, and I stand by the door.

“Becky, I’m sorry for keeping things from you.”

“Where you with him tonight?”

“Yes,” I answer in a small voice.

“What is going on, Alyssa?”

Her features soften as she watches me, waiting for an explanation. There’s so much to say that I don’t know where to start. I join her on the bed, and I tell her everything. I, of course, omit my feelings for James and the sexual tension between us.

“I don’t know what to say,” Becky says after I’m done.

“It’s a lot, I know,” I fidget with my hands, nervous to hear her opinion.

“Does anyone else know about your powers?”

“No.”

“Oh, My God! What if he tells everyone?”

“He wouldn’t,” I say quickly.

“You don’t know that, Alyssa. He is a werewolf. They hate us.”

*He’s different*, I want to say, but Becky is right. However, James has proven himself. He wouldn’t do anything to hurt me. He promised.

“Are you in love with him or something?”

My face flushes.

“No,” I say, but the tone of my voice betrays me because I realize that I don’t believe it myself.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” I say firmly, “He’s just helping me figure out my powers.”

“I don’t trust him. Whatever you are doing, please be careful.”

I want to assure Becky that James is harmless, but I can’t do that without looking crazy. His kind has oppressed the witches for years.

“Okay, now show me what cool tricks you can do with your magic,” Becky says enthusiastically, changing the topic.

I give her a small smile, my thoughts still stuck on what she said. *Why is James helping me with my powers? What happens after I figure out what I’m capable of? Will the other werewolves agree to witches having back their powers? Will he try to control and use me? What is the endgame here?*

“Come on,” Becky nudges me.

The realization that I’m falling in love with a powerful werewolf who knows my secret and could possibly have a mate sets in. I panic at the fact that I don’t know what his intentions are.

This could go so wrong.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SETTING UP FOR THE ceremony has been a long and tiresome week. It's the day of James's crowning as the Alpha, and I haven't seen him since he walked me home. The preparations for the party have kept me so busy that I haven't had the time to find him. He's never in his room, although I find his bed unmade every morning, the only evidence that he's somewhere in the house.

I find it strange that he hasn't come looking for me. It's been a week, for Christ's sake. Doesn't he miss me? The first few days, I thought he was busy with whatever the alpha's do before they are crowned, but Becky mentioned that she saw him a couple of times around the house.

By the fourth day, I concluded that he was avoiding me. It was the harsh reality check I needed to put me back on track with my plan to stay away from him. To keep myself distracted, I've developed a routine that doesn't allow room for me to wallow in my feelings.

I've taken up extra duties, and during my breaks, I bury my nose in the books he gave to me. I've made some progress with my magic. I can do simple spells and some tricks for Becky, who hasn't stopped gushing over my magic.

By the end of the week, I'm exhausted. I have blisters on my palms and feet from scrubbing the floor and carrying things

around. The guests, all manner of creatures, started arriving two days ago. A big number of them are bossy and entitled, so you can imagine the workload I've had tonight. I'm still expected to stand all night and serve snobby and rude creatures.

As dusk settles in and more guests start streaming in, we take our positions as the servers. We are under strict instruction to do whatever the guests want, no matter how absurd and impossible it is. Mike, of course, had to remind us of the consequences of anything going wrong. He glared at me as he warned us. At first, I thought he knew about what happened at the last party, but as I left, he whispered how he would break my neck if I broke anything.

"This is going to be a long night," Becky whispers beside me.

We are in the drawing room, serving drinks to the group of guests that just arrived. They are vampires, very pale and elegantly dressed. Contrary to the beliefs, they actually enjoy other drinks and meals apart from blood. Vampires and werewolves are not the best of friends, but they tolerate each other.

In the two minutes I've known the group, I've learned they are brutally honest. One in particular, a gorgeous tall woman who is dressed in all white, makes sure to let everyone in the drawing room know what she thinks of the Alpha, and let's just say that none of it is pleasant.

I assume that she is very daring or that she is important to the Eastons because the werewolves watch from the sidelines as she talks. I've seen them kill for the pettiest things, but now it's amusing to see them holding back their rage.

I watch the woman with admiration. I think I've found my spirit animal.

Her long, pointy nails tap her empty glass, and I rush to her, filling her glass and making sure that I don't spill on her extremely white jumpsuit, which I must say fits wonderfully on her lithe body.

“To the top, dear,” she says when I don’t fill the glass all the way.

I expect her to yell at me, but she is surprisingly nice for such a scary creature. She looks at me, her eyes narrowing with keen interest.

“Your blood smells amazing,” she comments as her fangs emerge. Everyone turns to look at us.

I freeze, and for a moment, I think she’s about to ask for a taste of my blood. Her nostrils flare as she sniffs me. Her other hand comes to my face and holds my chin with her thumb and index finger. A surge of power runs through me as soon as her cold fingers touch my skin. It feels as if I’ve had magic infused directly into my veins. The vampire felt it, too. Her pupils dilate, but she doesn’t seem fazed by what just happened. She turns my face from side to side as she watches me with unnerving scrutiny.

Her eyes drop to my chest, where the pendant Becky gave me has somehow come out of my shirt. Her eyes glimmer as she takes it into her hand and runs her fingers on it.

“Where’d you get this?”

She seems really interested in it. However, I don’t think that it’s special. It’s just a cheap necklace that has a lot of sentimental value. I really hope she won’t ask me to give it to her.

“A friend gave it to me,” I say, my voice wavering with uncertainty even though that was really the case.

After what seems like hours, she lets go, and I finally relax.

“I know you,” she says.

I don’t know how to respond to that, so I just give her a sheepish smile. I have never met this woman. She must be mistaking me for someone else, but I don’t tell her that, just in case she decides my blood would be a suitable drink for her instead of the mead.

“Such wasted power,” she sighs and rolls her eyes.

I'm tempted to ask her what she means by that, but I spot Mike glaring at me out of the corner of my eye. His lips curl up into a sneer, which is code for a warning.

I take a step back, and the woman goes back to insulting werewolves. The party starts at around ten, and the whole time, I make sure to keep my eyes on the vampire. I wish I could get her alone for a minute, but Mike is watching, and the vampire is now entertaining the same werewolves she claimed she hated a few hours ago. I'm so curious.

Most of the guests have arrived and are waiting eagerly for the new Alpha. My anxiety has sparked up in the last few hours. I'll finally see James, and I'm worried that he'll have a mate beside him, putting off my very last flicker of hope.

I've heard a couple of creatures mention Annabelle, and every time I go nearer to hear the rest of the conversation, someone beckons me for the drinks.

The vampire hasn't acknowledged me again even though I've served her twice. She could have been just blubbering. Vampires are notoriously known for crafty antics, but that surge of power was like nothing I've ever felt.

Once she excuses herself from the werewolves, I rush through the crowd to get to her, but just as I am a few feet away from her, a buzz of excitement fills the room, and four words stop me in my tracks.

"There's the new Alpha."

I take my eyes off the vampire and turn to the door where James and his father walk through majestically. It's like a scene from a movie, and James, Oh Lord! Looks so amazing that my body responds immediately as I set my eyes on him.

He is in a navy blue suit that fits him so elegantly. I smile to myself as I picture what lies beneath the suit. In the room, many women can't stop looking at him, and I'm no exception. Applause erupts as they get on the stage.

I'm praying for James's eyes to find mine, but he looks straight ahead. His expression is poised. It appears that I've broken my own heart yet again for expecting something from

someone who clearly doesn't want anything to do with me. I really have to stop being so delusional.

As his father starts his speech, I sneak out of the room while everyone's attention is on him. Once I get outside and the cool air hits my face, a couple of tears fall down my cheeks.

What was I even thinking, imagining that we could be together? James is the Alpha, and I'm his servant. That needs to sink into my head. I can't be thinking that just because he was nice to me for a day, he's in love with me. He's only interested in my powers. That must be it, and I've foolishly trusted him with my secret.

The applause erupts again back in the room, and then I hear his voice, crisp, deep, and commanding. He thanks everyone for coming, and I tune out his voice as he says things about being an alpha.

"...and thank you to the witches who set up everything." His voice comes back to me as he finishes his speech.

My ears perk up, and I sneak back into the party. There's a collective murmur going around, but another round of applause deafens it. I watch as James and his very angry-looking father get off the stage.

*He thanked us, right?* No one ever recognizes our efforts. It has never happened in all the years that I've worked for the Eastons. When I look over at Becky, she also has a stunned expression. The murmurs from the guests mean that they weren't expecting it either. *Does this mean that he cares about us? Me?*

James moves to a couple of groups, greeting the guests and talking with them for a second before he moves to the next. His smile widens as he gets to the next table, and when I see who he is smiling at? My blood runs cold.

She is dressed in a sultry, yet elegant red gown that really goes well with the navy blue suit he's wearing. Annabelle hugs his arm and clings to him as if she owns him. I suddenly feel sick. The bile in my stomach threatens to come up. I go back outside with my chest heaving and my stomach turning.

A few minutes ago, I thought he cared about me, and now he's with Annabelle. Ugh! This is all very confusing. I feel a headache coming on. I just want to go to sleep and forget that anything ever happened between me and James.

Mike will kill me, but I can worry about that tomorrow. Right now, I just need a good cry and some sleep.

I make my way to the house, avoiding the guards who I know would take the opportunity to harass me. I manage to get to the house through my blurred vision, courtesy of the tears that are threatening to break the bank.

“Alyssa.”

My heart shatters at the sound of my name in that heavenly bass. A few tears fall, and I wipe them away before I turn to face him.

He's so gorgeous, and despite the turmoil in my heart, my traitorous flesh reacts to him. We stare at each other for a few minutes, his blank expression searing into mine.

He moves closer, and his hand reaches out to my face, and his thumb wipes away another stray tear. The simple action tugs on my heart, and then I remember that I'm supposed to not be falling in love with him, and I sober up.

“Don't you have guests to tend to?” I ask bitterly.

“I don't care about them.”

“What do you want, James?”

His hot gaze searches my face and then lands on my lips. My ears burn hot as he closes the distance between us. My head tips back, and I catch the desire in his eyes.

“I want you.”

Before I can react to that, his lips crash on mine. I am so stunned that for a second, I don't know what to do, and then it occurs to me that James is kissing me.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ALYSSA'S LIPS MOVE AGAINST mine, soft and warm. She kisses me back, hesitant at first, then unrestrained, her tongue sliding into my mouth. Alyssa tastes beautifully sweet, a raw and exquisite taste that I can't get enough of. I can't hold myself back anymore, I'm not sure if I have any self-restraint left at this point. I hook my right arm around her waist, pulling her to me as my left hand cradles the side of her neck, angling her face and deepening the kiss.

Kissing Alyssa is everything that I imagined, sensual, yet heavenly. As we get lost in each other, everything else fades away, and then it's just us, two creatures with an insatiable desire for each other, our differences excluded from the bubble wrapped around us.

I could kiss her forever, especially with the little noises she's making at the back of her throat that are opening me up to a whole new level of desire I didn't think was even possible. I want her more than I've ever wanted anything in my life. Scratch that. I need her.

I kiss her until we are both breathless. Only then do I stop and press my forehead against hers as we try to catch our breath, and the air around us settles. In seconds, we are back at it again, only this time, instead of the thoughts of all the things I want to do with Alyssa, my head is consumed by my father's voice through my mind link.

*Where the hell are you, James?*

I want to tune him out. I wish I could because he's getting more persistent by the minute, but as Alpha, I'm not allowed to. A few hours ago, I was bound to the pack in a covert connection, which makes it impossible to dismiss any of the members. Besides, I swore to make all matters concerning the pack my priority. My absenteeism from my party does not paint a good picture of myself for the pack.

I need to be the best goddamn Alpha the territory has ever seen if I'm going to work on my plan to help the witches. That includes participating in small talk and keeping my hands off Alyssa for a while.

Knowing my father, if I don't get back to the party now, he'll send the others to come find me. The image of their new alpha in the most compromising position with a sworn enemy would piss them off.

With a muttered curse, I drag my mouth away from Alyssa's.

"I have to go..." I whisper breathlessly.

A brief flash of hurt crosses her eyes, but it's quickly masked by a blank expression. I don't want to leave her, but the guards will be looking for me.

"Oh...okay," she says blankly and clasps her hands behind her back.

I am troubled that I can't tell what she's thinking when her emotions are usually openly displayed on her face, enough for me to know what she's feeling.

She looks up at me, and under the blue moon, her eyes look like crystals. She catches her bottom lip between her teeth, drawing attention to the fullness of her lips. All I can think of is the things I want to do with her.

I suddenly miss the feeling of being in our own world. I desperately need it to be our reality, where our species doesn't determine who we can be with. I never want Alyssa to feel like I'm ashamed of her. If the consequences weren't so dire, I would show her out to the world. I mean, just look at her. She's perfect. I am lucky just to be in her presence.



“There’s so much I want to tell you, but they are coming.”

She peers behind me, her eyes widening with fear.

“It’s okay, Alyssa. I won’t let them hurt you. Meet me in the basement kitchen in a few minutes, I’ll explain everything,” I say calmly.

Two werewolves are coming our way. I hear their heartbeats as soon as they leave the mansion. It’s one of the perks of being Alpha. I can sense people from miles away with my heightened senses. Any minute now, they’ll stumble on us. I can see the wheels turning behind Alyssa’s eyes as she gauges whether to believe me.

*She doesn’t trust me.*

The realization makes my heart sink to my stomach. However, on second thought, I understand her. After that murky past, she has every reason not to trust me, but I have a plan to restore the supernatural world, and I really need Alyssa to have some faith in me.

“James, I…” her eyes dart behind me.

They are here.

I grab Alyssa’s shoulders, moving her out of the way and into the shadows as I intercept the werewolves before they see her.

“What are you two doing out here? The party’s that way,” I say as I step between them, hooking my arms around their shoulders and turning them back to the mansion.

I’m lucky that they are too buzzed to notice Alyssa’s scent or her heartbeat, which slows significantly when we leave. I’m hoping that she’ll show up. I have to tell her that she’s my mate and let her in on the plan I have for the witches. I also got her a little gift that has been burning into my skin through the pocket of my coat.

If anyone found out what I brought into the territory, I wouldn’t live to see another day. It’s as lethal to werewolves as wolfsbane is.

The party has obviously progressed wonderfully without me. A few creatures are staggering around in a drunken stupor, and

others are engaged in very obscene activities. If everyone inside is as drunk as they are, then I'm doomed. Werewolves get rowdier when drunk, and with the blue moon at its fullest, it's the perfect recipe for chaos. Good thing I don't have to deal with any of it. Another perk of being Alpha.

I just have to get through this then I can see her again. I already miss how her lips feel against mine, and after that kiss, keeping my hands to myself will be the hardest thing I've ever done. I'm already addicted to her.

The werewolves join their friends, leaving me at the front door. I take a deep, anchoring breath, adjusting my trousers to hide the evidence of my arousal as I walk into the party.

All eyes turn to me at once, and silence reigns in the house for a moment. This is a downside to being Alpha that I've come to distaste. With this amount of attention fixed on me, it will be impossible to get some alone time with Alyssa.

I scan the room, deciding on who to entertain. My eyes fall on Alpha Steven, who gives me a knowing smile and goes back to conversing with a group of alphas.

Before being crowned, I had to strike a deal with Alpha Steven to counter my father's. Instead of taking his daughter as my mate, I offered the alpha something that every werewolf wished they had- immortality. The supernatural abilities we have make us immune to natural death. However, we are not immortal.

The only reason Alpha Steven wanted his daughter as my mate was that the humans, armed with Silver and Wolfsbane, were attacking his pack, and he needed a stronger pack to back him up. A couple of elf friends I made in the city gave me a solution to the issue, and now, Alpha Steven has an amethyst crystal around his neck that makes him exempt from natural death. Annabelle is free to find her mate, and I have Alyssa.

I spot my father's angry eyes glaring at me from across the room. He calls me over with a wave of his hand. He has a crowd around him, and he's telling exaggerated stories as usual. I curse under my breath and make my way to him.

All week, he has been introducing me to every single Alpha in the region. I don't know if I can pretend to be interested in their politics anymore.

"Here's our new Alpha," my father announces with a smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes.

I look around the crowd of Alphas I've already met, giving them a tight-lipped smile, and then my eyes meet her icy ones. A vampire among werewolves. That's new.

Werewolves and vampires have never gotten along, and each species is always eager to eliminate the other, but for some reason, this vampire is comfortable around werewolves. They are all staring at her with admiration etched on their faces and others with pure lust, even though most of them already have mates like they didn't just hear her speaking ill of them.

She holds my gaze, smirking as she lifts the flute of mead to her cherry-red lips. There's something about the way she's looking at me, as though she knows all my secrets.

"James, meet Carmella," my father introduces her bleakly.

I can already tell that he doesn't like her from the way his lips form into a thin line. Carmella walks to my side as the Alphas clearly watch her figure in her tight-fitting clothes.

"It's so nice to meet the new Alpha," she says, extending her hand to me.

I take her cold hand and shake it firmly. She smiles, her green eyes glimmering mischievously.

*She definitely knows something.*

"She's an old friend," my father adds.

"Now, don't lie to your son. We have never been friends," she says sharply without taking her eyes off me.

I've never heard anyone talk to an alpha like that. She's either really powerful or knows his secrets. If my father hears her, he doesn't react. Instead, he ignores her and leaves with the rest of the alphas. I've never been fond of vampires, seeing how crafty they are.

“You smell just like her,” she hisses.

“Excuse me?”

“Your mate, the witch.”

*How the hell does she know that?*

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” I say, masking the surprise in my voice.

Carmella chuckles and leans in, her cold lips barely touching my ears, “Does your father know that his enemy is your mate? What does he think about her powers?” she whispers.

*Be careful with her son. She can’t be trusted.* My father’s voice booms in my head.

I look at him, searching his face for anything that might tell me he knows about Alyssa, but instead, I find annoyance plastered on his face, and thank heavens, it’s not directed at me.

“I might stick around just to see how it all works out. How will she react when she finds out you murdered her kind?” Carmella says, her eyes darkening with malice.

My blood runs cold.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I PACE AROUND THE basement, my hands clammy with sweat and my heart in my throat. I've been jumpy from all the times I heard a noise and thought someone was going to find me. Which was quite a lot in this old house. At this rate, I'm not sure if my poor heart can take another scare.

James was supposed to be here hours ago, but it's almost midnight, and I'm beginning to think he won't show up at all. *What's holding him up? Did he forget that he was supposed to meet me? Is he with Annabelle?*

My thoughts are spiraling out of control by the minute. Fidgeting with my hands and anxiously chewing on the inside of my cheek are the only things that are keeping me sane in the dark room with the only light coming from the tiny window. The party upstairs has died down, and the servants have gone to their quarters. I know I should have gathered what's left of my dignity hours ago and gone back to my room, but I'm still spooked by Mike almost finding me when I first got here.

Since then, with each passing footstep, my pulse has gone up, and I've been crossing my fingers and praying that the werewolves won't smell me. I shouldn't have come here in the first place. My curiosity got the better part of me, and now I feel stupid.

My decisions lately, that is, after James got here, have been questionable. There's a stubborn part of myself that keeps on hoping that something different will happen every time. I should go to bed, forget everything that has happened tonight, and free myself from James's charm. If this isn't the wake-up call I need to realize that he's bad for me. I don't know what will be.

*Oh, Lord! But that kiss...*

I haven't stopped thinking about it. My body has been humming with delight and yearning for more. Never have I ever been kissed so passionately. If it weren't for the guards ruining the moment, I'm certain my night would have ended differently, but it can't happen again. I have to move on.

*Why am I still waiting and hoping that he'll turn up and kiss me again?* The thought occurs to me, and I quickly shove it down.

The door creaks as it opens slowly, and I freeze. I rack my brain for a reasonable excuse to be here, and when I don't come up with one, I start to panic. I suck in a breath as a shadow is cast on the floor. From where I'm standing, I can't see their face.

"Alyssa?"

"Oh, it's you. Thank heavens," I say, holding my hand to my chest to still my thumping heart.

James closes the door behind him and walks toward me. The room instantly feels tiny, with his burly body taking up most of the space, or maybe I'm just really aware of being in an enclosed room with him and all the things that could happen.

"I was just leaving," I wipe my sweaty palms on my dress and gesture to the door.

"Alyssa, please wait. I know that I'm late, and I've messed up a lot. Give me one more chance to explain everything."

Every logical thought is telling me to leave, but the sincerity in his voice makes me stay. It wouldn't hurt to get an explanation.

“Okay, but be quick. I have to go to bed.”

James takes a step closer, and I lean back on the kitchen counter. I’m doing everything in my power to prevent my gaze from falling to his lips. I recall how firm and soft his lips felt.

“I’m sorry that I’m late. I had to lead a hunt, and I couldn’t get away.”

I nod absentmindedly, my body tingling where his hands held me a few hours ago. He licks his lips nervously, and I grab the counter to restrain myself. I want to kiss him so badly.

“I shouldn’t have disappeared on you for the whole week. I…”

His voice fades away when my eyes fail and land on his lips. If they felt that good on mine, I wonder what they would feel like on the rest of my body. Before I can explore the thought, I realize that I don’t know why James kissed me in the first place.

“...but I got you something.”

I gather my thoughts as James reaches into the pocket of his coat and retrieves a round white cloth. He unfolds it, and sitting on his palm is the most gorgeous stone I have ever seen. The colors keep changing from blue to green as if it can’t decide which one looks better.

“It’s a fire opal,” he says as the colors reflect in his eyes.

The shiny stone glimmers temptingly at me. I know those are not allowed in the werewolf kingdom, so how did he get it? All kinds of magic are forbidden in Rivendell. Magical creatures had to hide and stay in the shadows after what happened to the witches. The consequences of that day spread across the land. The wolves rose, and the other creatures fell in line or perished.

“What does it do?” I ask, fascinated by the prismatic play of colors.

“According to the people I got it from…”

I give him a suspicious glance, which he returns with a sheepish smile.

“Old friends, elves,” he explains.

I had no idea they existed Rivendell.

“They called it *qetza-litzle-pyolliti*. It changes colors according to the refractions of light on it, but on you, it will help you monitor your powers, what triggers them, and when they are at their strongest.”

I reach for the stone, and the moment the tip of my finger contacts the opal, a warm buzz runs through me, and the cold stone heats up. The colors stop swirling, and it finally settles on a breathtaking midnight blue.

“I want you to have it.”

I take the stone into my hands, surprised at how heavy it feels on my palm. I drop the cloth and allow the smooth surface to settle on my skin. It’s energy or mine, I’m not sure, flowing between us feels magical. I look up at James to thank him then I notice the redness fading from James’s palm. It looks like a burn.

*Oh! God.* It was burning him the entire time. How long has he been carrying around a burning stone in his pocket? It must have caused quite a bit of damage. I reach for his hand as the last of the redness is replaced by healthy skin.

“Why are you helping me?”

The question is out of my mouth before I can stop it.

“I have to help my mate.”

There’s a sudden ringing in my ears. I shake my head to get rid of it. The fire opal turns into a fiery green color as it burns hot on my skin. I drop it into my pocket once the heat gets unbearable.

“What?”

“You are my mate, Alyssa. You are mine.”

I chuckle nervously. “That’s not...it...no,” stutters compromise my speech.

“I’ve wanted to tell you for the longest time, but the timing was never right.”



I'm sure my jaw is hanging because my mouth suddenly feels dry. I don't know how to process what James has revealed.

"I'm a witch," I state out the obvious.

James smiles lazily, "It feels so good to finally tell you."

His words echo in my head. I am stunned, but his revelation has somehow settled an uneasiness I didn't know I had. It feels like I've been waiting for him to say it.

"I don't know what to say."

"That's okay. We'll figure it out. There's a lot that we have to think about."

"Yeah," I mutter as thoughts swarm into my head.

"But I don't want to think about that tonight," James says as he takes my hand into his.

A thrill runs through me, and instantly, my randy thoughts are back.

"What do you want to think about?" I ask quietly.

"You, I haven't stopped thinking about our kiss."

My self-control flies out the window, and in seconds, I am stepping up to him, pulling his face down to mine, and kissing him greedily.

James chuckles against my lips as he picks me up and places me on the kitchen counter. His strong hands go under my uniform, and when he reaches midthigh, he stops, smiles, and snaps the elastic of my stockings to my skin. I gasp. It feels electric, small shocks shooting through me.

Our hands explore each other's bodies through our clothes, but we can't get enough. I spread my legs to accommodate him between my thighs, and in the process, I knock over a couple of plates stacked on the counter.

They fall, bringing down with them some spoons. The sound of them clattering brings us back to reality. We look at each other, horrified, and then we burst out into laughter. We are definitely drunk on each other.

“Someone’s coming,” James says.

“What do we do? We have to hide,” I panic.

“Stay here,” he instructs, but I follow him to the door and hide behind it.

I hear their muffled voices, and then James pops his head back into the room.

“Let’s go,” he says, clearly amused by the situation.

We run up the stairs, James holding my hand and my other hand holding my shoes close to my chest. I can’t believe I’m sneaking around the Easton’s mansion. I feel like a naughty teenager.

James stops, and for a second, I think that someone is coming when he pushes me against the wall, hands on either side of my head, trapping me. His gaze falls on my exposed cleavage, and I catch the mischief in his eyes.

“No...no...,” my eyes widen in horror when I realize what he wants to do.

Before I can resist, James cups my left breast through my uniform, and the rest of my words get caught in my throat. I let out a sigh as his fingers find my sensitive bud, and his lips trail small kisses along my jaw. I get lost in the feeling of his teeth grazing my pulsing vein and his hand pinching lightly on my nipple.

I stifle my moans against his shoulder as buttons pop off my uniform, the sound of them hitting the stairs and labored breaths being the only sounds in the mansion.

This feels dangerous, and for some reason, I like it. Anyone could come around the corner and find me, my breasts spilling out of my uniform and the alpha’s head buried in between them, but I don’t care.

We miraculously get to his bedroom with all our clothes on, and then it’s a race to see who can get undressed first. James stops me when I get to my stockings.

“Leave those on,” he commands.

Heat floods my lower belly when I see how hard he is. My eyes roam all over his body, taking in the work of art that his muscles are. I want to lick every inch of his skin, but it seems James has other plans. He grabs me by my thighs, making me wrap my legs around him, and carries me to his bed.

I squeal in delight as he places me gently on the bed and immediately settles in between my legs. Fire explodes through me the moment his lips contact my pulsing core. James works expertly as his tongue pleases me in ways that I never thought were possible.

“I want you. Now!” I order him in a passion-filled voice that doesn’t even sound like mine.

A groan vibrates in his chest as he moves to get inside me, stroking slowly. My hands grab his waist, encouraging him to go deeper, and he does just that.

For the rest of the night, up until the wee hours of the morning, James and I writhe in the sheets until our bodies are completely spent. James drifts off to sleep, but it completely evades me. His words are still ringing in my head. I’m his mate, but we can’t be together.

The sun rises, and just like that, the fantasy is over, and I’m back to being his servant.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I COULDN'T STAY IN James's room anymore, knowing that despite us being mates, the dynamic between us will never change. To the wolves, I'll always be a servant, undeserving of an alpha, much less his attention and the witches would hate me for even thinking about the possibility of being with James.

I know the moon goddess doesn't play about with her match-making skills, and she's never wrong about her matches. No matter how much we ignore it, we'll always be pulled to each other, and if we reject each other, there will be serious repercussions.

James will go feral and might end up dying. I don't know what would happen to me, but I can only imagine something just as severe. James, however, seemed hopeful about the outcome of this predicament. I want to trust him, but once the werewolves find out, the witches are going to be subjected to more suffering. It doesn't matter that he's the alpha. It will be him against hundreds of bloodthirsty and stubborn wolves that would prefer his death to him mated to a witch.

On top of that, I can't convince the witches that James is different from the other werewolves. It feels like I'm betraying them, and I'm already riddled with guilt. Part of that is I selfishly want this to work out, but I don't want to cause more death and pain. We've endured so much already. Any decision I make from this point on is crucial. Chaos is brewing with

each complication, and if this is how the calm before the storm feels, I wonder what it will be like once calamity sets in.

After I left James asleep in his room, I walked around, mulling on my thoughts. It's a good thing that most people are sleeping in, or they would see a crazy woman walking in circles and talking to herself. When I finally make up my mind on the only logical solution, keeping everything a secret, I head to my room, hoping to take a quick nap before I have to start my duties for the day. It feels like I've been away for an eternity.

Despite the predicament I'm in, I can't stop thinking about last night. It wasn't just lust. It was the way James held me affectionately and how our bodies moved in perfect synch, as if we had done it before, that made it special. An intimate connection, something powerful and sacred, changed everything between us.

The thought of it makes my heart flutter, and my cheeks burn up. I get to the servants' quarters still on a high, with a stupid grin on my face that I can't wipe off. I wish that I could share my excitement with Becky.

My instincts immediately go off the moment I step into the house. Everything in my body is telling me to turn around. It's strangely quiet in a house that usually has chaotic mornings. The last time I had such an unsettling feeling, Maggie died.

"Becky!" I yell, fearing for the worst.

Silence greets me, and my heart drops. I rush to the living room, and that's when I see him watching me with terrifying leer. I've seen him around, the beta, a tall and burly guy with a permanent scowl on his face that makes him look dangerous, but not in a thrilling, sexy way.

In all my years in the Easton mansion, I have learned to avoid guys like him. They carry around a sense of entitlement and are every servant's worst nightmare, a master who gets off humiliating people. That's Lance, and his position as the Beta only makes him more insufferable.

For him to be here, something terrible must have happened. He wouldn't be bothered about servants. That's beneath him.

The only other reason I can think of is James.

He was okay when I left...unless this isn't about James. He's here for me.

"Alyssa."

The coldness in his voice, with a hint of disgust, ripples up the fine hairs of my arms and the back of my neck. I hold my breath, trying to master my uneven breathing. I can't let him know how scared I am. I just hope that my face doesn't betray me.

"Have a seat," he gestures to the couch with a thin-lipped smile.

I move to the couch against every instinct that is telling me to run away. When I sit, Lance turns away from me, facing the window. He then pockets his hands and lets out a deep sigh.

"Do you know where the other servants are?"

I look at the clock hanging on the wall. It's still early; the kitchen staff is supposed to be preparing breakfast, and the cleaning staff is sleeping in. I've known Mike long enough to know that he would make them clean up after the party was over.

However, I don't say all that. I'm not trying to be a smart mouth to an unpredictable wolf.

"They are working, Sir," I say in a small voice.

He turns at the sound of my voice and walks to the other side of the room, his heavy footsteps tuning out my voice. He looks around with a disgusted scowl. I then realize that he's deliberately trying to scare me.

"What have you been up to, Alyssa?"

He turns sharply to face me with a menacing glare that makes me sink into the couch.

My mouth suddenly dries up. I lower my eyes to my feet and stare at the floor, praying for this exchange to be over.

Lance moves to the couch at an inhumane speed and forcefully grabs my face, forcing me to look up at him as his fingers dig

painfully into my cheeks.

“Answer me! Witch!”

I look into his eyes, shocked at the sudden change in his tone and the rage on his dark face.

“Nothing.”

Lance lets go of my face and laughs dryly.

“Being the alpha’s whore doesn’t make you special. You are still a servant,” he spits angrily.

I’m relieved that he doesn’t know about my powers, but I’m appalled that he would call me names. *I’m not a whore*, I want to say, but I hold my words.

“I’ve always thought that you looked smart, Alyssa, but I’m surprised. I didn’t think you were stupid enough to allow James to use you like that.”

Lance looks down at my chest, where a couple of safety pins are preserving my modesty. His head cocks to the side as he studies me, “Are you in love with him?”

“I’m not...” I start to say defensively, but my voice fails me. Lance is right. I’m falling for James.

Lance chortles, “Really? James? The man who set witches on fire?”

I blink rapidly as I process his words. It all painfully clicks in my mind. I suddenly feel like there’s a metal band around my ribs stopping me from taking in enough air.

A sly grin appears on Lance’s face. “Oh! He didn’t tell you. After all the time you’ve been spending together, I thought he would.”

His words sting. I feel my heart hurting, a hot coal burning behind my rib cage.

“You are lying,” I say bitterly, my voice wavering with emotion.

“I don’t have a reason to lie, love.”

Disgust rolls through me as bile rises to my throat. Images of the witches burning come to mind as everything sharpens into focus. This is why they were insistent about revenge, and the whole time, I've been running around with the enemy and sleeping in his bed.

"It's in our nature to kill, and James gave into his primal instincts," Lance continues, his eyes crinkling up at the corners with amusement.

"Shut up!"

His eyes darken at my sudden outburst.

"I'll let that slide, but don't you ever raise your voice at me, witch."

My head is spinning, and the last thing on my mind is Lance's threat. I don't know how I became so gullible. How on earth did I believe that a creature filled with so much malice could actually be nice?

Tears burn hot in my eyes, and my throat hurts. I blink the tears away before they fall.

"I know you are hiding something else, and if you know what's good for you, you'll leave Rivendell before I find out. I already have a clue about what it is. The longer you stay, the more I learn."

My heart falls. I knew that everything would fall to pieces once my relationship with James got out, but I didn't expect it to be so soon, and I never thought that it would come to this. I can't leave Rivendell. It's the only home I've ever known. My family is here. I can't leave the witches.

"Goodbye, Alyssa," Lance says as he walks past me.

I sniffle, holding back tears. Lance slams the door on his way out, and I jump. It's only a matter of time before he finds out that I have powers. I have to leave, yet my body refuses to move. I don't know how long I sit like that, staring into the empty space in front of me.

There's a fist-sized hole in my heart, and the more I think about what James did, the more it widens. Did he think that he



could get away with murdering witches?

I should have known the personality he was presenting to me was fake. Fury replaces the pain in my heart as I make up my mind. I am going to avenge the witches.

With a heavy heart, I finally get up from the couch and storm into my room, my eyes frantically looking for things I'll need. I don't have a particular destination in mind. I must leave now. I'll worry about that later.

After packing a change of clothes into a backpack and changing out of my uniform, I pack the rest of my stuff into a trash bag, making sure not to leave anything behind.

I then open the magus to a spell I never thought I would be using so soon. I close my room and chant the spell out loud.

*“Obculto mea vestiguim.”*

My scent and any traces of me will be wiped as I move. This way, Lance will never find me, and neither will James.

This is it. I'm finally leaving Rivendell.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE FIRST THING I notice when I wake up is the empty space beside me. An unsettling feeling in my gut tells me that something's wrong.

"Alyssa?" I call out, listening for her heartbeat.

Usually, I'm not a heavy sleeper, but sleeping next to Alyssa, I felt so content that I must have dropped my guard. My thoughts run wild when I don't hear her pulse. Anything could have happened, and I wouldn't have been there to protect her like I promised. My wolf agrees with me, worsening the shitty feeling in my chest.

It might seem like an overreaction, but since Alyssa almost blew up the servants' quarters, I've been cautious. I suspect that Lance knows more than he's letting on, and all week, I've been on edge, expecting the worst. I'm yet to work on my plan to get as many wolves on my side as possible before shit hits the fan.

Even though I'm the alpha, Lance has more credibility with the wolves because they've been around him all their lives, and I've seen how loyal they are to him. I wouldn't be surprised if he tried to turn them against me, and if my suspicions are right, he'll be planning something.

I have to be on high alert at all times. If anything happened to Alyssa, I couldn't live with the guilt of knowing that when I

could have protected her, I was sleeping.

My anxiety tripled after I met Carmella. She knows so much about Alyssa and me, and from what I saw last night, she'll talk to anyone who'll listen. However, I'm not scared that she'll tell Alyssa that I set witches on fire. I was planning on coming clean about that even before she mentioned it. What terrifies me is that vampires are known to have an acquired taste for witches' blood. The magic gives them the ability to walk in the sun without burning into ashes.

If Carmella is anything like the typical vampire, she will be looking for ways to get a taste of Alyssa's blood, and she won't hesitate to kill her if it comes to it. I have to be on the lookout for both of them and let Alyssa know what's going on. It's not safe for her in Rivendell.

I already have a plan if anything goes wrong. Tucked away in a secret spot in the forest are rounds of silver ammunition and military-grade guns as a last resort. One might say that I'm being paranoid and over the top, but you can never be too careful, especially around deadly creatures.

I got the weapons when I realized that the wolves would attack Alyssa and the rest of the witches when they learned that she still had her powers. It's extreme, but I meant it when I said I wouldn't let anyone hurt her. They'll have to go through me first, and I would do anything to protect my mate.

The uneasy feeling returns when I get out of bed. It grows into a giant ball of worry in the five minutes that I've been awake. I'm trying to get it under control by convincing myself that Alyssa had to work, and that's why she left without telling me. The thought only lasts for a second before I figure out why I'm so anxious.

I can't smell her. Alyssa's scent in my room is so faint that if it weren't for my new sensitive sense, I wouldn't have gotten a whiff of it. It's certainly strange because last night, her scent was all over, and now it feels like she was here weeks ago. It couldn't have just faded overnight.

As I jump over the pile of clothes discarded messily on the floor, I step on something that burns my foot, and the pain

shoots all the way up to my knee.

I lift my foot from the silver pendant. The skin on the bottom of my foot has been burned off in the shape of a Celtic cross. If I hadn't reacted quickly, it would have burned all the way through my foot. Ordinary silver doesn't burn that bad. There must be something else embedded into the cross, maybe a spell, that makes the burn fatal.

Alyssa has been wearing the necklace religiously since Maggie's death. I know how much the necklace means to her. Even if she was in a hurry to get to work, Alyssa wouldn't leave without it. I take it as the third sign that something is terribly wrong.

I quickly get dressed and leave to find Alyssa with the necklace wrapped with a cloth in my pocket. I need to see her and know that she's alright.

"James, come have breakfast with us," my father's voice cuts to me just as I'm heading to the basement kitchen.

He walks to me and places his hand on my shoulder with a little more force than is necessary. Behind him is a smirking Lance, his father, and another alpha whose name I can't remember. The last thing I want to do is sit around and talk politics, but from my father's stern look, I know that I don't have a choice.

"Okay."

Breakfast is served outside on the terrace, an excessive and needless display of food for all the guests who choose to stay. As the alpha, I take the seat at the head of the table, directly opposite Carmella, who winks at me as she sips from a glass of blood. I catch a whiff of the blood, and I relax a little. It's deer blood.

Carmella must have had a very powerful witch's blood for her to stay out for so long without the sun obliterating her. Soon, she'll be craving more, and Alyssa's blood is perfect for her. I make a mental note to have a chat with her and remind her that Alyssa is off-limits.

I'm trying to keep a stoic expression, but I'm panicking. I should have smelled her by now or at least heard her heartbeat, but so far, there isn't a trace of Alyssa anywhere.

"James?"

My father, seated to my right, raises his eyebrows at me, and I realize that he asked me something and he's waiting for my answer.

"What?"

His jaw ticks, then he smiles, hiding his annoyance. "I asked if you met Alpha Bennet's daughter last night," he gestures to the alpha, whose name I couldn't remember.

"No," I answer tersely.

The more he pressures me to find a mate, the more my patience with him wears off. I'm so close to telling him about Alyssa, but I hold my tongue and swallow my pride, biding my time for the perfect opportunity. Until then, I'm stuck with entertaining his suggestions.

Across the table, Carmella is clearly listening in on the conversation. She gives me a bloody smile as she drinks. She hasn't told anyone about Alyssa and me, yet. It makes me wonder what she's playing at.

I tune out the rest of my father's conversation and ignore Carmella's glare as I search for my mate. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot Becky, Alyssa's friend, going into the house. I have to talk to her. She might know something about Alyssa's whereabouts. However, my father is still going on about Alpha Bennet's daughter.

"Excuse me," I interrupt him and walk away before he can stop me.

I can feel his deathly stare on my back, but that's the least of my worries at the moment. I quickly catch up to Becky and grab her arm, steering her out of view.

"Where's Alyssa?"

She looks at me, her eyes widening with surprise, and then she wiggles out of my hold.

“I don’t know, why don’t you tell me?” Becky asks sassily and crosses her arms at her chest.

“I’ve been looking for her.”

“So have I. I haven’t seen her since last night when you were with her, and this morning, when I went into her room, her things were gone. What did you do to her?” she asks accusingly.

My head spins as I take in Becky’s words. “I didn’t...”

A wave of emotions, spearheaded by immense guilt and regret, rolls through me at once. If someone took her, then I have to find her before it’s too late. I sprint past Becky to the servant’s quarters and then to Alyssa’s room, where I confirm Becky’s claims.

The room is empty except for a neatly made bed. Every surface has been wiped clean, and Alyssa’s things are missing, and so is her scent. It’s like no one has lived here for a while. I turn the room upside down, tearing through the bed and hoping that I’ll find something that connects to her disappearance.

I don’t want to accept the fact that Alyssa is missing. I can’t fathom the thought of something dangerous happening to her. It’s unlike Alyssa to leave abruptly without letting anyone know, not even her best friend. That leaves me with the only sensible explanation. Someone took her and cleaned after themselves. I couldn’t even find a strand of hair.

I think back to everything that has happened from last night to this morning, looking for a clue, anything that will tell me who would have wanted to hurt her. I can’t come up with anything, and then it hits me.

*Carmella.*

A surge of anger rushes through my body, and I let it out in an animalistic howl. *I’ll kill her.*

It doesn’t take me long to trace her scent. I follow the stench of blood into the house.

‘Hey, James,’ Lance gets in my way.

“I don’t have time to chat now, Lance,” I growl.

“Oh! I figured you’d want to thank me for fixing your mess,” he says as I walk away.

“I really don’t have time...”

I stop, “What mess?”

Lance grins, “Don’t worry about it. We’ll talk about it later. You obviously have somewhere important to be.”

“What mess, Lance?” I bark.

He takes slow steps to me and looks around. He’s getting on my nerves with each passing second, and he should know that now is not the best time to try me.

“You know...with the witch.”

“What?”

“The witch you were screwing. I dealt with her.”

Hot anger overcomes me.

“What did you do?”

“Relax, James, the issue with these women is that they fall in love and forget their place. It’s become an issue, and you get a scandal, so I handled it for you.”

“What did you do, Lance?”

I’m seething I can’t even see straight.

“I told you, I handled that...”

My fist connecting with his face muffles out the rest of his words, but I hear him clearly. I hit him until his face was a mess of blood.

“Dude, relax,” he tries to yell over my connecting fists.

Hitting him won’t hurt him. He will heal in minutes. I need something that will destroy him. I want him to feel my pain.

I grab him by his shirt and reach into my pocket. The silver burns in my hand, but I don’t care.

“What are you doing, James?” he asks as his eyes widen at my sizzling flesh.

I place the pendant on his chest, above his heart, and he yells in pain as the pendant burns through his shirt and then into his flesh. I hope that it sinks all the way to his heart.

“She’s my mate, bastard!” I yell angrily above his screams.

“James?”

My father’s voice makes me go still. I turn to face him, and the disappointment on his face breaks my heart. He heard everything.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

I HAVEN'T LOOKED BACK since I left the Easton's mansion. I know if I did, I wouldn't have the strength to keep moving. It's been eight hours of traversing through the dark and eerie woods, with one stop outside the Rivendell border to burn the rest of my stuff. Thick bushes obscure my way, I can barely see, and there's always the imminent danger of other creatures lurking in the shadows, but in my case, this was the safest route.

I couldn't risk walking in the streets where someone could recognize me. They must be looking for me by now. I can picture Lance putting together a team of the best wolves and instructing them to hunt me down, and James...

I don't want to think about him, but it's getting harder the longer I put it off. I've managed to shove down my feelings and distract myself with more pressing matters, like how to get out of the forest before dusk sets in.

I have no idea where I'm going. My whole life has been spent in the Easton's mansion, and the furthest I've ever been was to the wheat plantation, and that was during a vision.

An idea occurs to me. I know where I should go.

There's nothing but wheat stretching on for hundreds of acres. It's the worst hiding spot, so obvious, and that's what makes it perfect. Lance will be trying to outsmart me, the plantation

will be the last place in his mind, and James doesn't know that I know about it. I hope that I'm right, or else, I might just end up walking into a trap.

However, I have a feeling that I'll be safe there, and after what happened, I'm going to put a little more faith in my instincts. I hope the witches are still hungry for revenge. This time, I'll listen to them and do as they wish. James has to suffer, just the way they did.

The only issue is that I don't know how to get there from the forest. I was so determined to get far away from Rivendell and James that, at the time, direction didn't matter. My rushed and terrible navigation skills have won because now I'm in the middle of nowhere, and I think I'm lost, or I've just been going in circles. Everything looks the same, and I'm pretty sure I've walked by that very same bulky tree in the last hour.

Before I lose my mind, I stop to take a break and gather my bearings. I've been walking for too long, and exhaustion is starting to set in. I set down my bag on the ground and leaned against a tree trunk. I'm suddenly taken back the night of Maggie's send-off.

It's when I knew that my feelings were deeper than a mere attraction to James. He understood my pain, and that night, when he comforted me, he took away some of my pain and made it his. It was a secret understanding between us that he would always be there for me, and I felt closer to him. I thought he felt it too, or maybe I was too blinded with grief that I mistook his kindness for something more, but it can't be. It felt all too real.

After all he's done, I'm still in love with him, and I'm angry at myself for feeling that way. I miss him already, and I crave his touch more than anything, but it's better this way. We would have never worked out anyway.

Thinking about James makes me feel so alone. Out of habit, my hand goes to my chest, reaching for the Celtic cross pendant.

Panic sets in when I realize that it's missing. I pat down my clothes and check my pockets and my bag, but I can't find it.

My heart breaks once more. It's the only reminder I had of Maggie, and I lost it.

"Track descentit mea torque," I chant a finding spell, but nothing happens.

This is just great! My powers don't work anymore. I chuckle dryly at how, back in Rivendell, I was doing my best to hide them, but now, when I need them, they just disappear. Even the moon opal stopped glowing when I left Rivendell.

I feel empty without my powers and the necklace. It must have fallen when I was walking, but now that I think about it, I don't recall having it when I left James's room. I don't know what Maggie would be most disappointed in, carelessness or recklessness with the enemy.

I've failed her and the witches. I should have stayed and fought, but a single threat was all it took, and I cowered and left the only family I ever knew. I had a sliver of a chance at winning, but it's too late to go back. I'm powerless and extremely exhausted.

The tears that I've been holding for so long finally fall and I sob loudly, without a care that someone will find me. I curl up on the ground and let the exhaustion wash over me.

I'm just going to rest a little then I'll be back on track. Five minutes is all I need.

The last thing I hear before I drift to sleep is a howl from a distance. The werewolves are close, but my body feels so heavy. I can't move.



When I wake up, my body is sore, and I can't move a muscle. I hear a couple of voices floating inaudibly around me, but I can't make out what they are saying. I groan as a sharp pain pierces my body and ends up in my head.

The voices get clearer, but my heavy eyes won't allow me to see who's talking.

*Do you think she's the one?*

*She might be, but she doesn't look like one of us.*

I stir, and the voices stop.

“She’s awake. Get the priestess,” One of them yells.

A minute later, someone is hovering above me. Their scent is earthy and smells petrichor. Cool fingers touch my eyes, and the pain returns, more intense this time.

I scream out in pain, my dry throat adding to the pain. The person moves away, and my eyes fly open. The pain disappears almost immediately as I set my eyes on a group of women who are staring at me with curious looks.

I’m lying on a concrete floor in an empty room, and my clothes are drenched in sweat. I remember being in the forest, but I have no idea how I ended up here. I must be having a vision. It feels like one, but it looks real.

*My goodness!* I’m finally going crazy, and I can’t tell reality from my dreams.

The woman with the earthy scent steps forward, her long black dress sweeping on the floor. She has a kind face that reminds me of Maggie. The only difference is that on her forehead, she had three distinct moon tattoos. A moon waxing, full, and waning. I’ve seen them before, but I can’t recall where.

“We heard your cry, and we answered. Welcome, *obnube liberatoris.*”

“What? Where am I?” I sit up as confusion clouds my head.

“We can’t reveal that to you yet,” another woman with long blond hair and a fierce stare says.

“Am I dreaming? How did I get here?”

“You called, and we answered,” the woman with the tattoos replies.

I sigh in frustration. Her words don’t make sense to me. I didn’t call anyone. I was just taking a nap in the forest. *This is all very strange.* I suddenly remember the howl. *What if they are werewolves? Did she just call me a liberator?*

I get up to leave, but a wave of dizziness hits me and forces me back down.

“Drink this,” she holds a bowl in front of me.

“What’s that?” I ask, alarmed.

“Water,” she smiles kindly, “you are dehydrated.”

I shouldn’t. I don’t know her, but my mouth feels like I’ve eaten a handful of sand. I gulp the water greedily, savoring the cool feeling in my throat. It’s the best water I’ve ever had. The other women leave, but not before pointing at me and whispering among themselves.

“Who are you?”

“Meda, I’m the priestess.”

“What are you?”

She laughs softly, “I’m a witch.”

I let out a relieved sigh and let myself relax. I’m safe here. Witches wouldn’t hurt one of their own unless they were the kind of witches who make life sacrifices.

“Like me?”

“No, you are special.”

*Well, that’s not helpful.* I’m back to being tense.

“What do you mean?”

“That’s not for me to say.”

I resist the urge to roll my eyes. I just need her to tell me where I am, and then I can get going. I have to keep on moving before the werewolves find me.

“Okay, can I leave now?”

“You have free will, Alyssa. You can leave whenever you want, but I suggest that you first see her. She has been waiting for you. She’ll explain how to save the witches.”

“Who’s waiting for me? How did you know my name?”

Meda smiles, amused by my confusion, “There’s so much you have to learn. She’ll explain it better. Come with me.”

She extends her hand to me to help me up, and I take it. This time, I don’t feel dizzy. In fact, I’ve never felt stronger. I make

a mental note to ask for more water before I leave.

Outside the room, it's another new world. It's a small village with cobblestone houses that have plants growing on them. It's all very green, and there's a sweet scent in the air. It smells like maple syrup. A few people are walking around, but they all stop once they see me.

Meda gives me a minute to take in the scene.

"Is everyone here a witch?" I ask as I follow behind her.

"Yes, and wizards too."

My jaw drops. I've never heard of places where witches and wizards existed in so many numbers and with such freedom. This must be a parallel universe.

"Go straight and take a left. You'll see the house," Meda stops abruptly and points through an alley with snake plants climbing up the walls.

"Aren't you coming with me?"

"No," she says blankly and walks away.

The path looks unused. Bright orange flowers are growing on the ground, and it feels like I'm not supposed to step on them. *What have I gotten myself into?*

I try to step around the flowers, not completely successful. I feel guilty about the ones I step on, but as I walk, the ones I've stepped on grow back almost immediately. I follow Meda's directions, and then I see the house.

I've been here before.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

IT TAKES TWO WOLVES and my father to pry me off Lance. Of course, by then, it's too late, and the pendant has caused damage to his skin.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”, my father yells as the other wolves drag a yelling Lance away to the healer. The scene has drawn some attention, and some wolves have gathered to watch.

They stare at me as if I've lost my mind. They are afraid of me. Good. Lance will serve as a lesson to anyone who dares to mess with me or anything that belongs to me.

“In my office, now!”

He's outraged, but I can still see fear behind his eyes. I'm still holding the pendant, and it's still burning into my skin, but the pain doesn't compare to what I'm feeling in my heart. I'm not yet done with Lance.

He's lucky my father saved him. The next time I see him, he won't live to see another day. Next time, there won't be anyone to save him, and I'll make sure he tells me everything.

“Put that thing away, for Star's sake,” he says, referring to the necklace.

My mind is still stuck on what Lance said. *How did he deal with Alyssa? What did he do to her?*

“Now! James.”

I follow my father as I pocket the necklace. The burns heal almost immediately, and I smile to myself. This is better than any weapon invented.

“What was that back there? You can’t beat up your beta like that. You almost killed him, James.”

*I should have killed him.*

My father doesn’t acknowledge what I said about Alyssa being my mate, even though he clearly heard everything. He’s ignoring it, sweeping it under the rug just like he’s done about everything that is uncomfortable to him. However, I’m done hiding that Alyssa is my mate.

I don’t care what happens anymore.

“He hurt my mate.”

“James,” he exhales, and a huge vein appears on his forehead.

“You don’t know what you are talking about. You can’t have a witch as your mate.”

I hate the tone he’s using. He has used it when invalidating my feelings or evading my questions. He thinks that he knows what’s good for me. It’s the same condescending tone he used when I asked him if he was sure that the witches killed my mother.

“You don’t know them, James. They would do anything to get to power,” he said back then.

I’m not a child anymore, and how could I not know that Alyssa is my mate?

“Alyssa is my mate,” I say firmly.

“Now, James, you know werewolves and witches can’t...”

“I don’t have time to argue with you. I have more important things to deal with,” I cut him off, trying to be as respectful as I can.

As much as he’s annoying me, he’s still my father, and I don’t want to do anything that leaves me with a lifetime curse.



“James!” he yells as I leave.

I follow Lance’s yells to the healer’s room. He’s writhing in pain as she pours a dark green substance that burns into his wound, then smoke comes out. He sees me, and his face hardens.

“Leave!”

The healer scrambles to her feet and leaves Lance and me. I take the necklace from my pocket and hold it above Lance as the pendant swings dangerously close to his open wound.

“Don’t,” he yells as his eyes widen with terror.

“Start talking. What did you do to Alyssa?”

“I swear, I didn’t do anything, James.”

I lower the pendant, and when the end of the cross touches his skin, he lets out a growl. His wolf is threatening to come out, but with the silver in his bloodstream, it won’t be able to for a while.

“I only talked to her. That’s it.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I saw her coming out of your room, and I thought she was your...” he stops, knowing that his next words will cause him more pain.

“...I thought something was going on between the two of you, and she was slacking in her job and forgetting her place. I just wanted to remind her that she’s still a servant.”

*Who the hell does he think he is? Alyssa is more worthy than he’ll ever be.*

“What else did you say to her?”

“I told her that you set witches on fire.”

I should have seen that coming. It was bound to come out sooner or later. I just wanted it to come from me and not some low life like Lance.

I raise my eyebrow at Lance, waiting for him to continue.

“That’s it.”

*He's lying.*

I drop the necklace on the wound and wait until he says something.

"I suspected that she was hiding something, so I told her to leave before I found out what it was," he says breathlessly as the silver continues to burn.

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know, man. Please take it off," he begs.

"Lance, are you the alpha?"

He shakes his head.

"Are you the head of staff?"

"No," he says, close to tears.

"What are you?"

"A beta."

"Good. That's all you'll ever be. The second option. Don't you ever involve yourself with things that don't concern you."

I can see the fear in his eyes. He knows that I'm debating whether to kill him now. However, I decided to spare him. I might need him in the future. I finally lift off the necklace, and he lets out a relieved sigh.

He yells for the healer, who is hesitant to get back into the room.

After I leave, I go to my office in the library to think over this new information. Alyssa is out there on her own. She could be anywhere by now. One thought hit me hard. She hid her scent.

She doesn't want me to find her.



I've been carrying the guilt of what I did all those years ago in my heart, and twenty years later, the universe is punishing me for my sins.

*Why would James see a witch out of all creatures as his mate?*

For the werewolf to continue in leadership, his mate must be a pure-bred wolf. *Why can't he see the other girls I've chosen for him?* This would have been easier if he had chosen a wolf, but I know my son.

He's very adamant about the things he sets his mind to. He won't leave the witch alone, so it's up to me to deal with her before it gets out that he is a traitor.

I have called the only two people I trust to get their hands dirty without asking questions. Carmella, I don't trust her motives, but I've worked with her over the years when I needed someone to disappear. She has been loyal so far, but of late, she has been gloating too much. The last time we worked together, we organized for humans to attack Alpha Steven's territory and make his pack weak.

The plan was when he came to ask for help, I would propose to join our territories through his daughter and James. I don't know how he did it, but James somehow found his way through the arrangement.

The other person is Lance. He's driven by hatred, and he would do anything to prove that he's not the second best. It'll be the first time I've used him, but I know he'll do well.

My territory will not be weak because of a witch. I didn't let it happen all those years ago, and it's never going to happen while I'm alive. I've already summoned Carmella and Lance, and I already have the plan. It's only a matter of time then we'll execute it, and the witch won't be an issue anymore.

As I wait for Carmella and Lance, I pour myself a shot of whiskey and ignore my mate's piercing glare on the portrait on the wall. I can imagine her shaking her head at my plan, just like she did when I told her what I had planned for the witches so that they would stop pestering us.

Nina was against it all, but I couldn't let my territory fall. It all worked out in the end, even without my plan, but I lost her and a piece of myself when she died.

I don't know what Nina saw in the witches. She had too much faith in them, but I truly knew them for what they really were:

power-hungry people who would stop at nothing to gain more power.

I know that because I took the territory from them and built it up on my own. I had to fight and pry it off their hands. I won't lose it to return to her killers.

"This is for the good of the territory and James," I say out loud, trying to convince myself that it's the right thing to do.

I throw back the shot of whiskey to burn some of the guilt away.

"I'm surprised that you needed me again so soon, Mr. Easton."

Carmella interrupts me from my thoughts. I've never really liked her because, like all vampires, she's selfish, and she'll only do whatever benefits her.

"It's about James," I say as I pour another shot, and offer Carmella some.

"You know I prefer to get drunk off someone's blood. What has James done this time?"

"You are just in time. Have a seat," I say to Lance.

"What's going on? Why is he here?"

In the past, Carmella and I have only worked alone, but this time, I need someone who is on my side. After I saw Carmella talking to the witch, I knew that she was up to something.

"He's here to help."

I take a sip of the amber drink. "I need you two to take care of the witch. If she's really his mate, then she'll be back. I want you to be on the lookout. If she doesn't return, then you'll have to find her before she becomes a bigger problem."

Lance places his hand on his chest, where that terrible burn is yet to heal, his face set in determination. Carmella grins. This is what I meant. Execution without questions.

"I'll do it as long as I get to have a taste of her blood."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE HEAVY STENCH OF death and the sudden dread in the pit of my stomach when I get closer to the house are a reminder of my vision of the farmhouse. I can swear that it's the same house, only that in the vision, I never got to see what it looked like.

It's a two-story house wooden farmhouse that is the only one in the village that is not made of stone and doesn't have plants growing on it. It's surrounded by bare soil, and any plants that attempt to get within two feet of it wither and die.

I know that the original house burned to the ground, but the feelings it evokes are too similar for it to be a different house. The moment I step on the barren soil, I hear the screams, deafening and haunting. This is where James burned those witches alive.

*"Ulciscor specialis,"* the voices scream, and then quietly, *"ad postremum, venisti ulcisci."*

They start a new chant, whispering the words in a low tone. I can't tell which is more eerie between the screams and whispers, but I'm going to avenge them, and they can finally rest.

A strong sense of déjà vu strikes me when I touch the doorknob. *How does it still exist? Is this some kind of parallel world?*

I don't know what I expected walking into the house, but the strange smell, like mold and moss, is a quick reminder that people died in there. However, the scent only lasts a second before it changes into sage burning. Inside, it looks like a normal household: a living room, an open kitchen, a hallway leading to other rooms, and a staircase.

However, there are a couple of strange things in the living room and on the walls. There are skulls of all sizes and odd shapes everywhere, a scythe hanging on the wall, mounts of dead ravens that I'm pretty sure turn their eyes when I look away, and signs of a triple spiral all over the walls. The signs of death let me know that whoever lives here is a necromancer or connected to death in a way.

In the corner stands a seven-foot dry and scrawny tree that looks like a man. The trunk separates into two and then joins in the middle, giving the illusion of legs, and the branches are woven together to form what looks like outstretched arms. The head is made of tangled branches, and there's a single green leaf sticking out at one end of the arms.

I suddenly get the urge to touch it. Something comes over me, and then the next thing, I'm standing next to the tree, reaching for the green leaf. It's so tempting and green. It's practically begging me to pluck it.

"Don't touch!" a raspy voice says behind me, jolting me back to my senses.

I turn around, hiding my hands behind my back. She is standing a few feet away, dressed in the same black dress as Meda, and I must say that she is the strangest woman I have ever seen.

She's covered in the same spiral signs that are on the walls, her eyes are completely gray from the cataracts in them, and her face moves subtly, like a glitch, into different but fitting features every other second. I can't tell what her real face is.

"Oh, I wasn't..."

"I'm not talking to you," she says sternly and points behind me where the leaf has extended into a thin branch and is

almost touching my hair.

It shrinks, and the green leaf falls off the dry tree.

“What is it?”

“My green man. He’ll kill you if you get too close.”

I hastily take a couple of steps away and clasp my hands together. I don’t think my brain can handle any more strangeness.

“Have a seat. I’ve been waiting for you.”

I sink into the couch, avoiding encountering anything else that might be trying to kill me. The woman drags a chair from the kitchen and sits in front of me. Her face stills for a minute and settles into oddly familiar features. She looks just like Maggie.

“Many spirits have taken my body. I can’t remember what I used to look like,” she explains, noticing my confusion. “I take the face of the one you’ve lost.”

I stare at her, as I rack my brain for something proper to say to that revelation.

“Who are you?”

“You are asking the wrong questions, Alyssa.”

“What is this place?”

She closes her eyes and shakes her head, “What do you want to know?”

“How do I avenge the witches?”

She shakes her head again, and I sigh. I can’t think of anything else to ask. Everyone in my life is accounted for, except for my parents. Growing up, I didn’t think about them or mourn them. Hundreds of us were going through the same thing, and no one really mentioned the names of those who were killed. Since I had Maggie by my side, I didn’t lack a parental figure.

“Who were my parents?”

The necromancer gets up and moves so swiftly that if I hadn’t seen her eyes, I wouldn’t have guessed that she is blind. She

picks up a skull from her collection, an obsidian blade, the burning sage, and a lighter.

“Normally, I answer questions about death, but I’ll make an exception for you.”

She places the items on the floor and sits next to them, cross-legged. She then gestures for me to join her.

The necromancer turns the skull so that the top side is lying on the floor. The lights in the house go off, and we sit in the darkness until she lights up a fire in it, which burns with a bright green flame. She then reaches for my hand, and before I can protest, she slits my palm across and holds it over the green flame.

With each drop of my blood, the fire changes color from green to red. A few more drops and the flame turns fiery red.

“Welcome me into your world. Let me see your faces,” the necromancer chants into the fire.

I cradle my bleeding hand close to my chest, watching the fire closely. In all my years, I’ve never wondered what kind of people they were or what they looked like, but now, as the fire grows bigger, I find myself yearning to know everything about them.

My anticipation grows with each minute. The necromancer reaches into the pocket of her dress and grabs a fistful of some powder, which I find out is black pepper. A few seconds later, I sneeze. She throws it into the fire and gives me a toothy grin.

“Sometimes spirits can be stubborn. I need to force them to come to me,” she explains.

The flame flickers, and inside it, I see two very vague figures. They grow clearer and after some time. The figure, a couple locked in an embrace, is standing in a corridor that looks too familiar. I can’t see the man’s features, but the woman leaning on his shoulder looks just like me, but with lighter hair and green eyes. It’s like looking into a mirror.

“We’ll fight like we always do. We are so close to winning. I can feel it,” the man says to the woman while holding her shoulders.



“I’m just so tired of yelling at them, and they never listen to me, Noah,” the woman laments.

“They will one day.”

Noah, my father, has the most striking blue eyes I have ever seen, with long dark hair that falls just above his neck. I got my eyes and nose from him, and the rest of it belongs to my mother.

It feels surreal watching them, strangers with familiar faces, who are supposed to be my parents. I wish I knew what they were like. It would put more perspective on their faces, but they are already gone, and I will never know.

“Are you ready, Victoria?”, another figure walks into the picture.

A very tall woman with a lithe body and dark hair flowing down her back. I would know those eyes from anywhere.

That’s James’s mother.

“Do you think he’ll listen to us today, Nina?”

“Yes, I’ve convinced him to look into it. I’m sure there’ll be some positive changes today,” James’s mother says and opens the door to Mr. Easton’s study, except that it looks like a huge conference room.

I follow my parent’s figure into the room, where more people join in. I recognize a few faces: James’s father, a few werewolves, and then a vampire, the one at James’s crowning party.

My parents were part of the council.

The fire goes out before I can see more faces.

“I want to see more,” I say to the necromancer in the sudden darkness.

“I can’t show you that, but I can show you how they died.”

I want to yell. *I’ve just met them, through some kind of mirage, and now she wants me to see them dead. Is she crazy?*

The lights flicker on, and the necromancer gets up. “I know it’s sudden. I’ll give you a few minutes, then we’ll get back to it,” she says and disappears through the hallway.

I bury my face into my hands and stifle a scream. I never thought that my parents were such important people. *Why didn’t anyone tell me? What were they fighting for, and why did James’ mother act like they were friends? Werewolves can’t stand witches.*

My mind is reeling with so many thoughts that I don’t know which one to process first.

“Noah and Victoria,” I say their names out loud.

It’s unfair what the werewolves did to witches. I could have grown up in a loving home, but they just had to take that from me.

*Do I really want to know what happened to my parents?*

“Okay, let’s begin,” the necromancer says, and the lights go off again.

She lights the skull and slices her hand first, then mine. This time, the fire burns with a purple haze.

“Come to me, friends,” she says as her eyes roll backward so only the whites are showing.

The image comes up. It’s the same conference room, with the same people around the long table. They are all yelling over each other’s voices, except for the vampire, who’s watching them with keen interest. Their voices rise, and right then, I know that something terrible is going to happen.

This is the night James’s mother died, and I think my parents killed her.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

EVERYTHING HAPPENS TOO FAST. One moment, everyone's yelling, and then the next, chaos erupts, and blood is everywhere. Silence follows as they all take in the scene.

Everyone's looking at James's mother's dead body, and they all miss the tiny figure walking out of the room. The vampire is so quick that no one notices. James's mother's head has been blown into pieces. The weapon that made the mess, a blade stuck into the wall, vanishes, leaving behind a dead body, a dent in the wall, and a very angry wolf.

"What did you do?" James's father's voice booms through the room, the mirage, and finally into the necromancer's house.

He's seething, and his anger is directed at my parents. My mother has her hand outstretched as if she's the one who threw the blade, but I'm certain that she didn't. I was watching her, and she didn't have anything in her hands.

They all turn to look at her, and she raises her hands up in surrender.

"I didn't do anything," she says, but I can tell that they don't believe her.

"She didn't do it," I say in a small voice.

An enormous black wolf charges at my parents, ripping their heads off. I watch in horror as blood spurts out of their bodies

and stains the room.

“The witches have killed our Luna. Gather all of them,” someone yells, and the werewolves rush out of the room.

The black wolf walks over their bodies, and the rest of the creatures follow suit. I don’t realize that I’m crying until I taste the saltiness of my tears. All these years, witches have suffered for something they didn’t do. It all could have been avoided if the werewolves took a moment to listen to my mother. If they did, they would have figured out the vampire killed their Luna. They must all pay for what they did.

The image fades out, and another comes up. It’s the vampire walking into a house. She goes from room to room, throwing things around.

“What is she looking for?”

“You.”

The vampire finds a baby in a crib and picks it up. She stares at it for a couple of minutes and then takes it outside, where the werewolves are already gathering witches. No one pays her attention as she walks away with me in her arms.

She goes into another house and then places me in a basket full of laundry and covers me with the clothes, only leaving a small breathing space. She glances at me once more and then leaves.

The vampire saved me. *But why?*

The image changes to Maggie packing things into a bag when she hears me crying. She picks me up and takes me with her.

The fire dies, and the lights flicker back on.

“What just happened?”

“Your mother was a seer. She saw the future. She knew what was coming. Victoria hid you when she was pregnant until she gave birth to you. She confided in the vampire about you, and the vampire rescued you when they started killing witches.”

“But didn’t she kill the Luna? Why did she save me?”

“We don’t know who killed Nina, and the vampire has never revealed why she saved you.”

Minutes ago, I was certain that the vampire was to blame for everything, but now I don’t know what to think. *Did I even see her throwing the knife, or was that just my imagination? Why did she save me?*

“This was all fate. The witches were meant to suffer, and you are going to end it.”

“How will I do that? I just discovered magic, and I only know simple spells.”

“You are more powerful than you think, Alyssa,” she says and walks away, leaving me to my thoughts.

I sit there for hours, replaying what I’ve seen. I’m overcome with many different emotions. I feel angry that the werewolves acted first without questioning everything. I’m saddened by the thought of the different life I could have had with my parents and all the lives lost in vain.

I’m determined to fight for the witches, but I feel helpless because I don’t know the first thing about liberating people. If this was fate, should I know how to save everyone?

“You can leave if you want. Meda’s waiting for you.”

“What do I do about the witches who want revenge?”

“Don’t worry about those old hags. Now that you’re here, we’ll do a ceremony tonight and send them off.”

I thank the necromancer and walk back into the streets. Meda is waiting for me, just as the necromancer said she was.

“You look very pale. Let’s get you something to eat,” Meda comments once she sees me.

I follow her absentmindedly until we come to her house. It’s nothing like the necromancers. It’s warm and cozy, and I immediately feel at home.

“Have a seat. I’ll get you something to eat.”

I sit in the kitchen, placing my hands on the aisle as I stew in my thoughts.

“Did you know?” I ask Meda after a while.

“Yes. Everyone here knows that we were wrongly accused,” she says as she stirs something in a pot.

“How did you get away?”

“When the wolves started killing us, some of us managed to escape into a wheat farm. We only stayed for a couple of days before your mate set the house on fire.”

I lower my eyes at the mention of James.

“We were working on somewhere to hide for a while until things got better, an alternate reality in the middle of the wheat field. That way, the werewolves couldn’t smell us, and no one would ever find us. Unfortunately, before every witch got through the portal, they were killed.”

Meda blinks away tears before she continues, “The rest of us built this village and kept a low profile, until you appeared in the fields, in Orla’s house.”

“Who?” I interrupt.

“The necromancer, Orla.”

“We thought you were with the werewolves, especially since you smelled like him, the alpha’s son. Orla then got a message from the spirit world that you are going to be our savior. Since then, she has been trying to get you here, especially when Maggie died. We had high hopes that you would come then.”

“What am I supposed to do? I don’t know how to save the witches.”

“Maggie was supposed to teach you everything about magic, but it was too dangerous in Rivendell,” Meda says and puts a bowl of tomato soup and steaming hot bread in front of me.

My stomach grumbles, reminding me that I haven’t eaten all day.

“Eat up,” she instructs and then gives me an odd look.

“What is it?”

“Didn’t Maggie leave you something? A Celtic cross? She was supposed to give it to you so that you could find your way to us.”

My stomach churns even though there’s barely anything in it. “I lost it, but I’ll get it back.”

As I eat, Meda tells me all about the village and how they built it. I’m fascinated that all this time, I thought that there weren’t any more witches and the whole time, they were just hiding in plain sight. The witches back in Rivendell would be delighted to learn about them. Finally, there’s hope that we will get out of the werewolf’s hold.

“It’s okay if you want to leave and go back to your mate. You two need each other,” she says after I’m done eating.

The bread and soup threaten to come back up. I don’t want to think about James right now, but Meda is right. I need him. I want to fight for the witches with him. It feels right and a lot less scary when I think about him being by my side. However, I can’t overlook what he did.

“I want to stay and learn magic. I have to help the witches in Rivendell.”

“Okay, I’ll show you to your room, rest and freshen up. We are having the ceremony tonight.”

Meda shows me to my room and gives me a change of clothes. It’s a small room, bigger than the one in Rivendell, and just enough for me. For hours after I take a shower, I lie on the bed, staring into the empty space in front of me.

*How can I still love him after everything I’ve seen today? Why can’t I stop thinking about him?*

Meda comes to get me when night falls. We walk with the other witches, who still haven’t stopped staring at me. I notice that almost all of them have the Celtic cross around their neck or tattoos of the moon like Meda and others’ sun wheel tattoos. Meda explained that they are all representations of the gods: the green man, the moon goddess, the sun god, and the horned god.

“It’ll pass. We don’t get to see new people around here,” Meda explains, staring.

Her explanation might be right, but I know what they are all thinking. *How will a weak witch with a werewolf for a mate save them?*

We walk to Orla’s house and stand at a distance, where the plants stop, and the bare soil begins. All witches and wizards form a big circle around the house. Orla comes out with a basket full of skulls and burning sage.

The basket is then passed around as everyone picks a skull and sage. I happen to pick one that is too small, a child’s skull. It breaks my heart to think that whoever it was died unjustly.

“These are the skulls of our people. They have done their work, and now we have to send them on their way,” Orla explains.

I hear a couple of sniffles throughout the group, and it breaks my heart even more. Some of the witches are holding their loved one’s skulls.

We all follow Orla’s instructions and put the sage into the skulls. Orla lights them on fire, and a girl comes around, placing a handful of a blend of herbs into each skull.

“I know the killer should be here to ask for forgiveness, but he’s not. Alyssa, will you ask on his behalf?”

My jaw falls. I was not expecting this. Everyone looks at me, waiting for my answer. I look around at the faces illuminated by the moon’s glow, and then I look at my hands, at the child’s skull.

*Does James deserve mercy?*



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“YOU’VE DONE SO WELL with your training,” Meda comments after a spell-casting session.

We have been going at it all week, training on all genres of magic and perfecting spells. Time has gone by so quickly that I can’t believe just a week ago, I packed my belongings and left Rivendell. It feels like a long time ago.

“I don’t feel strong enough to defeat hundreds of werewolves alone,” I complain.

“I’ve taught you all there is to magic. You have trained enough, and we are here to help if you ever need us.”

The witches have been very welcoming to me, and I’ve made a couple of friends besides Meda and Orla. It’s so nice here in the village; there are no wolves to order me around, and I don’t want to leave.

However, I have a duty to the witches, and the more I stall, the more they suffer. I’m no longer afraid of fighting for the witches, but I’m terrified about seeing James again.

“You are thinking about him,” Meda says softly.

I swear she can read minds; she has been doing it to me all week, yet she denies it. Meda is right. I haven’t stopped thinking about James, and although it’s only been a week, I feel like I’ve been away from him for an eternity.

I miss him so bad that it hurts. The thought of seeing him makes me excited, but also nervous as hell. I left abruptly. What if he has moved on? So much could happen in a week. I mean, look at me: days ago I was a powerless witch, and now I can perform the most intricate and complicated spells. *Will James hold me with the same tenderness he did on our last night together, or will he shun me away? Does he even feel the same way I do?*

I don't want to get hurt again.

"What should I do, Meda? I'm confused."

"It's not my decision to make. Do whatever your heart wishes or don't...it's up to you, Alyssa."

The thing about Meda and Orla is that they are always blunt with their words, and every time, they are right. It's like a superpower only they have.

"Are you going back to Rivendell?"

I think about Becky and the other witches being terrified of wolves all their lives. I have to go back to Rivendell. The witches need me.

"Yes."

"Will you come back here, or will you stay in Rivendell?"

Ugh! I hate it when she asks difficult questions that I don't have answers to. I hadn't thought that far. I've been so focused on going back to Rivendell that I didn't think about what would happen after I fought for the witches, that is, if everything goes to plan and I don't die in the process. It would be a dream to live with the witches, but I've been away from James for a week, and it feels like I'm falling apart without him. I can't imagine an eternity without him.

"I...I don't know."

"You are always welcome here."

When I see Orla later, she makes the same points. It's upsetting to leave when I've grown fond of these people and even gotten used to Orla's changing faces and her tree, which is always trying to take me to the other side. I've learned a

great deal from her, including how to control my visions. Turns out that the visions were just the beginning of all the things I could see. Orla said that I would make a great necromancer, and I might just follow that path if I'm alive at the end of this.

After a long and teary goodbye, I finally leave the village with a huge task ahead of me. This time, I don't have to go through the forest. The portal, a clever way to move around without being detected, takes me back to the wheat plantation in Rivendell.

*"Obculto mea vestiguim,"* I repeat the spell to cover up my scent just in case the first one wore off.

I also don't want anyone, especially Lance, to know that I'm back. He'll kill me at the first chance he gets, and since I have no idea what happened after I left, I have to be cautious. There might be an army waiting for me for all I know.

Rivendell hasn't changed in the week that I've been gone, although I can't help but notice the difference between the town and the village. Rivendell is dull, with a dark and terse energy around it. I know it would have been better if the witches were free, like in the village.

Getting into the Easton's property is a challenge. It's heavily guarded, more than when I left. However, I have lived here my whole life, and I know a few of the places that are not guarded. My first stop when I manage to evade the guards is the servant's quarters.

Somehow, the house looks worse than when I left it. There are broken windows, a roof that will cave in at any time, and the front door's lock is missing. The inside has seen better days.

I can't believe what the werewolves have subjected us to. We shouldn't have suffered for this long. However, things are about to change.

At this hour, the servants should be back from cleaning up after dinner, but it's oddly quiet. I can't even hear the normal snoring of the wizards that I was used to. I take the stairs to Becky's room, hoping that she's in there.

A figure is curled up on Becky's bed, so tiny that I almost think that it's a child.

"Becky?" I call out as I switch on the lights.

My heart shatters at the scene in front of me. The room is a mess. There are piles of clothes everywhere, dirty utensils, and all kinds of trash. Becky is the neatest person I know. She would go crazy in such a state. Something must have happened for her to tolerate the mess.

Becky is curled up on the bed, in a childlike pose.

"Becky?"

She stirs, and I walk over to her and sit on the bed.

"Becky, wake up. It's me," I shake her awake.

Finally, she wakes up and turns to face me. My hand goes to my mouth as I gasp in shock. She looks very sickly. Her eyes have sunk into her bony cheeks, her lips are so dry that they have several cracks on them, and her face is deathly pale save for a purple bruise around her left eye and her jaw.

"Alyssa?"

"Oh! Becky," I sob.

"What are you doing here?"

Her voice is so raspy that I can tell it hurts to talk.

"Let me get you some water first. Is that okay?"

She nods, and I run downstairs as my tears flow non-stop, and my heart is riddled with guilt. Becky gulps the water greedily as if she hasn't had any in days.

"What happened to you?"

"I don't know what to tell you. It's been a long week for everyone. Where have you been?" she sobs.

I take her hands into mine and notice the blisters on her palms. "I'm here now. How did you get these bruises?" I touch her jaw, and she winces.

"The beta was looking for you, and he thought I knew something about your disappearance."

My chest burns with white, hot anger. Lance is going to pay for what he has done.

“It’s not that bad. You should see the other guys,” she manages with a small smile.

“What about these?” I point to her blisters.

“Oh! They have been making us work all day and night until one of us caves and tells them where you are. I should be getting back to work now, I promised that I’d only take a few minutes off.”

“You are not going anywhere,” I stop her when she starts getting up.

“But they’ll...”

“Stay here and get some rest. I’ll deal with everything.”

“*Coalesco.*”

Her blisters and bruises fade away, and some color returns to her face.

“I should have been here to protect you. I’m sorry.”

Becky holds my hand tighter, “They’ll kill you if they see you. You have to run, Alyssa.”

“I’m not running anymore. If I die, then I’ll do it saving the witches.”

Becky looks at me as if I’ve gone mad. I know what she’s thinking. I have no chance against the werewolves.

I squeeze her hand, “Trust me, Becky. Now go back to sleep.”

“Alyssa?”

“Yes.”

“Be careful.”

I want to kill Lance, but I need to go through with the plan first before I draw attention to myself. One thought keeps on recurring in my head. *Where was James when all this was happening?*

I find myself in his room minutes later. At first, I don't see him, but then I hear him snoring softly. James is sprawled on the armchair beside his bed. His head is hanging at an uncomfortable angle, and his hands are held out in front of him as if he's waiting to hold something.

There are burns on his palms, Celtic cross-shaped burns that look really bad. My necklace, the one I got from Maggie, is on the floor, between his feet. He's been holding it even though it hurts him.

He looks so good, even with the short beard that has grown on his jaw, and the dark circles under his eyes. However, I can tell how troubled and tired he is. He keeps on mumbling and twitching in his sleep.

Before I can stop myself, my hand reaches out and tucks away a stray dark curl that has fallen on his forehead. At my touch, he wakes up.

"Alyssa? Is that really you?" he squints.

My throat feels so tight that I can't speak. I manage a nod. He mumbles something and then jolts up again.

"Did I fall asleep again?"

He frantically searches the room, and then he relaxes back into the seat. He looks past me, and I realize that he doesn't think that I'm real.

"James?"

"I'm sorry, Alyssa," he mumbles deliriously.

"James?" I call out louder, shaking him awake. "I'm right here, James."

A sharp pain pierces through my heart. I think James might be dying.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I HAVEN'T SLEPT IN a week. Days have blended into each other. I can no longer tell what day or time it is, but frankly, I don't care. I just want her back. I've been miserable, irritable, and, as per my father's words, moping around in my emotions.

I never thought that it would hurt this much to be away from her. It feels like my soul is being ripped from my body, and with each day that goes by without seeing her, I lose a small part of myself. I've learned that it's better to disappear behind the pain than to live through it, so I've been letting my wolf take over most of the time.

It has chosen to deal with its pain by expressing it in anger. It's the reason I've been snappy and more hot-tempered than usual. It's only a matter of time before it completely takes over, and I get lost in it. If that happens, the wolf will become feral, and the pack will be forced to kill me. If that doesn't happen soon, I might as well die from heartache.

Either way, I get to die, and I hope it's better than this never-ending sorrow.

Every day after she disappeared, I turned the town upside down, leaving no stone unturned as I looked for my mate. Even my elven friends couldn't find her. For three days straight, I was holding out hope that I would find her until I finally accepted that she was gone.

The acceptance phase was hellish. I saw her everywhere. It was either something that reminded me of her, someone with similar features, or a whiff of her scent, which would turn out to be too fruity or too floral a second later.

By the fourth day, I was certain that my mind was playing tricks on me. She was everywhere, and it drove me crazy because I couldn't find her. After that, I stopped going out, and I've been in my room since then. Maybe if I stay still, she'll come to me.

I've been alone with my lucid dreams, and the only thing I have left to remind me of her. My hands have burns that are yet to heal from holding Alyssa's necklace for too long. I won't let go, no matter how much it hurts. Letting go feels too much like admitting that I'll never see her again, and a small part of me is still hopeful.

Sometimes, I see her coming to relieve me of the pain, and sometimes, she's so real that she talks and sits with me. I can't tell what's real anymore, but I know that I'm dying. All I have to do is wait.

Tonight is one of those days when Alyssa becomes real to me in my dreams, and even though it's a sign that I'm going crazy, I cherish those minutes of happiness. Those moments are the only thing keeping me alive at this point.

This time, I see Alyssa in her nightgown, with the moonlight casting a dramatic illumination on her that she looks heavenly. It was the first night I met her. I recall her scent, fruity and sexy. Instantly, it fills my nostrils, and for the first time in a week, I smile.

I watch in awe as she walks to me, her dress blowing in the wind. She comes close, so close that I can practically touch her, but I can't.

*My hands have burns on them,* I remember sadly.

Alyssa touches my head with her cool fingers, and something like an electric zap shoots through me. I want to reach out to her, but I can't. Something is stopping me.

“Alyssa, is that really you?”



Her eyes become sad and shine with tears. I raise my hand to wipe them away, but it's too heavy.

“Don't cry, I'm here.”

Alyssa starts fading away, and I beg her to stay until my throat hurts and I can no longer make out what I'm saying.

“Please, James, come back to me,” she cries.

*Is this real?*

I want to move so badly, but I'm no longer in control of my muscles. My wolf has taken over a big part of me. He won't let me out. He vowed that we would never be hurt again.

“Please, James. I need you,” Alyssa sobs on my chest. I can feel her tears seeping through my t-shirt and on my skin.

*It's real. Alyssa is back.*

My body feels heavy, and I can't even open my eyes all the way. I'm tempted to slip back into that comfortable space of numbness, but Alyssa is here, and she needs me. I have to be there for her no matter what it takes. I must be in control again.

I can feel Alyssa's hands on mine as she chants a spell. Warmth floods my body, and I can move my hands for the first time in a while. A sharp ringing sound pierces in my head, and my wolf shrinks at the annoying sound.

When I open my eyes, Alyssa is staring at me with teary eyes and concern written all over her face. I throw my arms around her, enveloping her in a hug. She goes still for a second before she wraps her hands around my neck.

We stay like that for some time, holding each other like nothing else matters. Alyssa sobs into my chest, and it's only when she wiggles uncomfortably that I let go.

She looks at me, taking in my face as if she's seeing me for the first time. I realize that I haven't bothered to take care of myself in the past few days. I probably look horrible. She, on the other hand, looks as amazing as ever.

She's glowing, and her blue eyes have never looked more alluring. Her hair is pulled back into a high ponytail, giving her face a lifting effect. She's striking. Every day since she's been missing, I've imagined what our reunion would be like. I've thought about the words I want to say to her, but now, as she looks at me with that piercing gaze, the words disappear, and my mind becomes blank.

There are a lot of unspoken words hanging above us, and the longer they stay there, the uncomfortable tension between us continues to grow.

I just want to hold her and forget everything that has happened. I need a fresh start.

"You are back."

"Yeah," she answers blankly.

"Thanks for healing me," I gesture at my palms.

"It's nothing."

"I..." we both start at the same time.

"You go first."

"I have to go," she says, and it feels like I've been pulled back to where I was an hour ago, drowning in total agony.

"Wait, I want to talk to you."

"Go ahead."

She sits on the edge of the bed and grabs her necklace from the floor. This is the perfect time to tell her how I feel, but my wolf is still hurt, and the words that come out of my mouth are worlds apart from what I intended to say.

"You left."

I don't mean for my tone to be so accusatory, but it comes out that way, and I can't take it back. She's taken aback by my comment. She frowns, then pursues her lips into hard lines as her eyes harden.

"You promised that you would keep me safe."

*That stings.*

“You said you had a plan for the witches, yet you let them suffer. Do you know what has happened to Becky?” she continues, raising her voice.

“Alyssa.”

She laughs painfully, “I forgave you for what you did to the witches. I asked their spirits to forgive you on your behalf.”

I feel like a jerk.

“And do you know that your father decided the fate of witches without any evidence?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I saw it all, James. My parents were part of the council, and they were innocent. Someone else killed your mother, but your father blamed it on my parents just because he wanted the territory all to himself.”

I know that my father can be discriminatory sometimes, but what reason would he have to frame the witches when the killer was right there? It just doesn’t make any sense.

“Who killed her?” I ask out of curiosity.

“I don’t know. The blade came out of nowhere, but I know it wasn’t my parents.”

“You don’t believe me,” she adds.

“I do, Alyssa, it’s just that...”

“It’s okay, I get it. Witches’ words aren’t credible.”

She gets up to leave, and I grab her arm. She crashes into my chest. I don’t want to fight anymore. We can talk this out and figure out what happened to my mother. However, that is the last thing on my mind with her lips so close.

I remember what it was like to kiss her. It’s been so long, hours and days of craving for her. Our night together has been a constant memory in my head. She looks up at me with an emotion I can’t decipher in her eyes. I wish I knew what she was thinking about.

“I’m sorry for everything I did. I was young back then, and I know that’s not an excuse. I was blinded with rage and pain. There’s not a day that I don’t regret what I did.”

Her gaze drops from my eyes to my lips.

“I’ve been so lost without you all week that I became selfish. I should have been there for the other witches.”

She angles her head as I lean to her. We are so close that if either one of us moves, our lips will be touching.

“I believe you, Alyssa. We can figure out who really killed my mother.”

I’m not just saying these words because I want to kiss her. I mean it.

Alyssa closes her eyes, a soft sigh melting from her lips. I’ve never wanted to kiss someone so bad, but I want her to make the first move.

She opens her eyes and blinks away tears that have gathered in her eyes.

“I have to go, James,” she says, pulling away.

I watch her as she walks away. It feels like all the blood has been vacuumed from my heart, and now it just feels like a big empty hole.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I'VE NEVER BEEN SO scared of losing someone as I was when I saw James. If I hadn't found him when I did, his humanity would have gotten lost, and he would have died. I got there just in time, and pulling him out was the most nerve-racking thing I've ever had to do. It made me realize how much I love him. I couldn't stop praying for him to come back to me.

However, I was still annoyed with him, and I couldn't let myself get lost in my feelings again, well, except for that little moment we had.

I was so close to kissing James. That's all I've been thinking about all week. He said all the right things and looked at me in the right way, like I was the only one worthy of that gaze. When I left the village, I vowed that I would make the witches my priority. It's important to me that justice be served first, then I can have a look at personal matters.

It just doesn't feel right to experience pleasure while Becky is hurt and the person to blame is walking around scot-free.

I had to find a way to prove to James and everyone else that my parents were innocent. It's too bad that I don't have spirit-conjuring skills like Orla, but there has to be something in this house that will prove their innocence.

After I leave James's room, I sneak into his father's study, where everything happened. It has been twenty years, and all the evidence must have been wiped off during the renovations, but I have faith that I'll find something.

*"Ignis."* the green fire burns bright in my palm, lighting the dark room.

I reimagine everyone in the room that day, and I try to pretend to throw a knife to the center of the portrait, where the knife went into the wall before it disappeared. From where my mother was standing, she couldn't have thrown the knife at that angle. Her wrist would have to be twisted in a weird way, and impossible to hit the target.

Everyone's position proves their innocence, but the knife had to come from somewhere unless the knife wasn't aimed at the Luna. Someone else in the room was the target, and the knife must have been manipulated to hit the Luna at the last minute. Now that I think about it, a simple knife couldn't have killed James's mother in such a gruesome way.

There was magic to it, and the good thing about magic is that the tracks never disappear, no matter how many times the area is cleaned or renovated. They stain every surface and remain there until whoever casts the spell covers their tracks.

I hope whoever did it forgot to cover up.

I need to move that portrait, but I can already imagine how heavy it must be. Plus, I don't want to trigger any alarm systems just in case there are some. I need James.

I rush excitedly to his room, but before I get there, two figures block my way. Before I can react, the vampire blows a pungent powder to my face, and Lance covers my mouth with a cloth so I can't scream.

The powder itches on my skin, and in seconds, I feel weak, and dizziness overcomes me. I try to fight it, but it quickly takes over my mind, clouding it and creating a darkness that I plunge into minutes later.

"Hello, Alyssa," the vampire greets me with a bright smile.

“I told you to never come back to Rivendell,” Lance says as he comes behind me and catches me as I fall,

He then throws me over his shoulder like I weigh nothing. My vision blurs, and as we walk away from the office, I outstretch my arm.

I was so close.

Darkness embraces me, and I sink into it.

When I come to, I’m still hanging over Lance’s shoulder. It’s dark all over except for the lights that are fading away in the distance.

“Where are you taking me?” I ask groggily.

“I knew we should have used the stronger stuff,” the vampire complains to Lance and hits me on the head with a blunt object. That sends me back into unconsciousness.



“Wake up!” Someone is shaking me violently.

My head hurts. It feels like someone is working a jackhammer in there. I can’t move. My legs are tied together, and so are my hands. I’m bleeding. I can feel the blood flowing down the side of my face. I’m seated against a tree trunk, and Lance is the one who’s shaking me awake.

I can tell that we are in the forest even though it’s pitch dark. My eyes adjust to the darkness and see Lance’s and the vampire’s figures. Too bad my vision isn’t as good as theirs.

“This is her?”

A new and very familiar voice joins us. A large figure with a heavy presence.

“Yes,” Lance answers.

“Hmm, she looks so familiar.”

The voice finally comes to me. It’s James’s father.

“She has been working in your home all her life. She, of course, looks familiar,” the vampire says sarcastically.

I remember when I was charmed by her wit. I wanted to be her, but now I knew better, even though it was a little too late. *Why is she attacking me now? Twenty years ago, she saved me.*

“Okay, get it done and let me know when you burn her body,” James’s father says, and then his figure walks away.

I can’t say that I’m surprised. James’s father has had a personal vendetta against witches for decades. Of course, he would want me dead.

I’m not good enough for his son.

“You should have listened to me, whore,” Lance says spitefully.

“You are a coward,” I finally find my voice.

“What did you just call me?” he yanks my ponytail with enough force to pull my hair off my scalp.

“I said you are a coward,” I spit on his shoes.

“I can’t wait to kill you,” he laughs manically.

“You can’t kill her yet. We had a deal. I’ll have my fill of her blood. Then you can do whatever you want when I’m done.”

Lance lets go of my hair and steps away.

“Would you rather watch me feed? Go!”, the vampire yells at Lance, who walks away, mumbling to himself.

“Finally, we are alone,” the vampire says when Lance leaves.

“What do you want?”

“Oh, Alyssa. You don’t know how long I’ve waited for this moment.”

She walks to me and squats in front of me so that we are face to face. She reaches out with her pointy finger and scoops some of the blood flowing on the side of my face.

She takes a deep breath and then licks her finger clean.

“This is the best reward ever. When I saw you at the party, you had magic, but you were not strong like you are now. I was



right to be patient. If I had taken you that night, it would have been a waste.”

She gets up and starts walking around the tree.

“I’m sure you have a lot of questions, and since I’m a reasonable person, not like Mr. Easton, I’ll give you the chance to die with the answers.”

“Why did you save me?”

“Ah! You know about that. Well, your mother, Victoria, was too trusting of the wrong people. It was strange since she saw the future and all that. I thought she was wise enough, but I was wrong. Your mother trusted me with a secret, you.”

The vampire sits beside me, her cold skin rubbing on mine. With the way we are seated so close, no one would ever guess that she wants to kill me.

“No one else knew about Victoria’s pregnancy. The thing is, when you know too much about the future, you become paranoid. Victoria had already seen the bloodshed at the council meeting, and she wanted to protect her only child. She was a nice lady, just stupid.”

“Don’t talk about my mother that...”

“Yeah, I know, but it’s the truth. Around that time, I also happened to walk in on another secret: Mr. Easton’s plan to kill your parents.”

“Why would he want to kill my parents?”

The vampire shrugs, “I didn’t care. I only saw an opportunity in the two situations. Mr. Easton was going to kill your parents and the rest of the witches. That wasn’t good for me because I need witches’ blood,” she stops to take more of my blood.

“On the day the Luna was killed, I immediately seized the opportunity, and I saved you from getting your powers taken from you. I knew that years later, I would come back to collect my reward.”

“Who killed the Luna?”

I know I should be begging for my life, but I'm curious, and if I die, I want to know who did it so that I can come back and haunt them for the rest of their lives.

"No one knows, although I suspect Mr. Easton does. I didn't care what issues they had. I had to save you."

"You waited twenty years to have my blood?"

"I am a very patient creature, Alyssa, and I'm immortal. I could wait for eternity if it came to it."

I manage a dry laugh, "I'm flattered."

"You should be. You are special, and so is your blood. Here's what we are going to do. You are going to tell me where the rest of your witch friends are. The ones who taught you magic, and then I'll drink your blood, and Lance will come to finish the job."

I try to keep my pulse steady and my breathing even. She can't know how shocked I am. *How the hell does she know about the witches?*

"Don't even think about lying to me," she says as her fangs come out.

"I don't know what you are talking about," I say blankly.

"You are lying, Alyssa. You know I can tell," she hisses against my neck.

Her fangs trace the vein on my neck, and I try to stay still. If I move, they'll cut me open.

"I'm not," I swallow.

The vampire retracts her teeth and gets up. She walks a few feet away, and I start thinking about a way to escape. I'm still weak, so I can't use my powers. I'll have to come up with something else. Before I can look around, I am suddenly slammed against the tree with a force that knocks the air out of my lungs. Her eyes have turned into a bloody red color, and her fangs are already on my neck.

"I told you I'm a patient creature. I'll find them even if it takes me all my life. I guess you'll have to do for now."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THIS FEELS WRONG. I'VE spent all week wishing for Alyssa's return, and now that she's back, my pride has gotten the best of me, and I've let her walk away from me.

Sitting in the armchair doesn't feel comforting anymore. I feel pathetic.

*What am I doing?* I should be with Alyssa, helping her out and working with her on her plan to save the witches. She won't come again if I stay here. I have to go to her first, show her that I meant every word of everything I said.

After a quick shower and a change of clothes, I step out of my room for the first time in days. It feels like I've stepped into a different world even though nothing has changed in the days that I've been in my room. Alyssa's scent is faint, like she's hidden it again, but I won't ever let myself forget it.

I follow it down the hall to my father's study, but before I get there, another scent catches my nose. It's pungent and smells like rotten eggs. I've been in the supernatural world long enough to know that it's Sulphur, and it makes witches' and fairies' powers weak.

I also get a whiff of Lance's scent and another bloody one that could only belong to Carmella. The Sulphur particles are still scattered on the floor, and in them, there are three different footprints. The first set obviously belongs to Lance; the

pointed heel and flat toe is Carmella's, and the sneaker print could only be Alyssa's. It's the right size, and the other two prints leave traces of the sulfur, but the sneaker ends there.

*They have Alyssa.*

I charge through the doors, my wolf coming out midair. I follow the scents into the forest while focusing on others. It might be a trap for me. I have to tread carefully.

*Please, Lord, don't let me fail her for the second time.* I say a prayer as the scents get stronger.

I smell blood from a distance. Alyssa's blood, but I ignore my thoughts, which start reeling in when I recognize her blood.

When I see her, I charge and pounce on the vampire whose teeth are about to break her skin. Carmella snarls at me, but I don't give her the chance to escape from my jaws. I throw her around like a rag doll, my teeth sinking into her flesh with each throw.

She yells and tries to wiggle out of my teeth, but I already have the upper hand, and I'm not letting go until her soulless body dies for the second time.

I'm so focused on killing Carmella that I don't notice the gray wolf coming to attack me.

"Watch out, James," Alyssa yells, but I sense the wolf a second later, and it slams into me, making me drop Carmella's body.

I recover quickly and decide to end Carmella first. She'll almost be there anyway. However, the gray wolf, Lance, keeps on hindering me. The more he stops me, the more Carmella gets time to recover. She's an old vampire and will heal quickly.

Finally, I get a chance to sink my teeth into her again. This time, I won't let go, even when Lance jumps on me and tries to knock me down.

My wolf enjoys the cracks in Carmella's body, and when her body becomes still, and there are no more bones to break, I let her go and turn to Lance.

*Is this how you've chosen to die? I thought you liked the silver method better,* I say to him through the mind link, reminding him of how I burned him with the Celtic cross pendant.

*I'm not scared of you,* he says a second later. However, he's body language tells a different tale. He takes a couple of steps backward when I get too close.

Alyssa somehow managed to free herself when I was dealing with Carmella. She looks at me and smiles sweetly.

"I'll take him."

I have no doubt that she could kill Lance with the snap of her fingers if she wanted, but Lance can't die so easily. He has to suffer first. He's caused both of us so much pain.

"I know of a better way to finish him off," I say as I change back into my human body.

Lance sees this as the perfect opportunity to escape, but Alyssa puts him down with a spell. We both walk to him, and I ask Alyssa for her necklace. The wolf whines, making begging sounds.

The moment I place the silver on his skin, his wolf abandons him, and he becomes human. The scar from a week ago is still visible, and the wound hasn't healed properly.

I place the cross on the wound and watch him as he screams in pain.

"Wow, but I had a different idea," Alyssa says as her eyes glitter with excitement.

"I made a friend who's always hungry for souls, and the good thing is that once he takes them, he tortures them forever."

I watch as Alyssa places her hands on the ground and starts a chant. At first, nothing happens, but then Lance's body starts sinking into the ground. Dry vines grow around and inside his body, tearing it into pieces.

Lance's screams and body get swallowed into the ground, and then when his body completely disappears, a single green leaf comes out of the ground. I get the urge to pick it up, but Alyssa stops me.

“Don’t touch that. He’ll take you too.”

“Who’s that?”

“The green man,” she gives me a toothy grin.

“Remind me to never get on your bad side.”

“One more thing,” she says as she walks over to where Carmella’s body is.

It’s subtle, but if you take a closer look, you can see her bones joining and her flesh growing back.

*“Ignis.”*

Carmella’s body lights on fire, turning her into ashes in seconds in the blue flames. I look at Alyssa, impressed by her new skills.

“Your father did this.”

Noise pours into my ears as I replay Alyssa’s words.



After a long day of fighting, killing, and trying to stay alive, we finally leave Easton’s property and Rivendell into the next town, where James apparently owns a couple of buildings. James, Becky, and I settle into James’s mansion.

Becky looks healthier, and she’s back to herself. We didn’t tell her the details of everything that happened. We only told her that she had to leave. If she knew that we killed Mr. Easton’s henchmen, she wouldn’t have come with us.

James has been oddly quiet after I told him that everything was his father’s doing. I feel sorry for him. I still haven’t told him what the vampire told me about who had killed his mother. He’s had enough heartbreak for a day.

“What’s on your mind?”

His voice draws me out of my thoughts.

“You.”

He’s in the kitchen, pouring himself a drink, and I’m watching him as I eat.

“Indulge me, please.”

“You’ve barely said anything after I told you about your father.”

He takes a deep breath and takes a sip of his drink. “I don’t understand why he’s so full of hate.”

I leave my sandwich and walk over to him. I wrap my arms around his torso from the side and lean into him. James tenses up at the unexpected embrace, but he relaxes into it.

“Thanks for saving me today.”

“It’s okay. You would have done the same for me. You are badass.”

I lower my eyes shyly and take a step backward. James grabs me by my waist and pulls me to him. He sets the glass on the kitchen counter and wraps his arms around my waist.

I hold my breath as I wait. His eyes soften as I look into them.

“I don’t want to ever lose you again.”

My heart flutters.

“I’m in love with you, Alyssa.”

It’s not until I hear those words that I realize I’ve been waiting to hear them. All this time, I’ve been worried that he didn’t like me back. James has a very unreadable face, and he doesn’t wear his emotions on his sleeve like I do.

“May I kiss you?”

I nod, and before he leans in, I reach up to him, hooking my hands around his neck, and I kiss him. James lifts me by my thighs and sets me on the counter, standing in between my legs. It reminds me of the first night we spent together. My body purrs with desire at the thought of that night.

James tastes sweet, like the drink he just had. A naughty thought pops into my head, and I wonder what it would taste like on the rest of his body.

He trails small kisses along my jaw, and I bend my neck, opening my throat for him. I giggle, warmth rippling over my

skin as his breath brushes against my ear. I can't help the whimper that escapes my lips when his teeth graze the vein on the side of my neck.

The iron length of him pulses against me as I grind into him, trying to get as much friction between us as possible. We move to the living room to get more space, and I make sure to carry the glass with me.

“What’s that for?” he raises a perfectly arched brow.

“You’ll see.”

I straddle him when we get on the couch. Our hands roam over each other’s bodies, stroking and cupping over the clothes. I can’t get enough of James.

I unbutton James’s shirt, and I pour the whiskey on his chest. I then get on my knees and watch it flow and form a small pool on his stomach. I follow the trail with my tongue licking off the whiskey. James makes a rough and torn sound as I lick, and I smile, satisfied. I didn’t even know that I had it in me to make the most powerful creature in Rivendell unravel before me. I am filled with a sense of pride as James moans beneath me.

“Come here.”

He pulls me up and carries me to his bedroom. On the way up, he makes sure to grab the bottle of whiskey.

That night, we roll in bed together until we sate each other’s hunger.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

“LET’S GO OVER THE plan one more time,” I lay the map of Easton’s property on the dining table.

Even though this is the third time we’ve reviewed the plan, they all gather around and listen keenly as I go over everyone’s duties.

Last night, Alyssa and I realized that, in as much as we believe in our powers, we couldn’t take down hundreds of werewolves. We had to call in some reinforcements, and they all showed up first thing in the morning.

There are a couple of werewolves, some from my pack, and Alpha Steven and his wolves. Alyssa called in the witches. Some were servants back in the mansion, and others were Alyssa’s new friends. Other creatures who heard of what we were fighting for and joined us. Our differences were put aside, and we all had one goal in mind: to free the witches.

We have three more hours until Alyssa and I walk back into the territory. Everyone else is going to serve as backup, just in case the wolves attack us. Until then, they’ll stay on the sidelines and wait for a signal.

I have no idea if our plan will work. It might all go very wrong. I know my father is a stubborn man, and he would rather die than allow the witches to be free. I’ve been feeling

uneasy all day. I want to say that I'm just nervous, but deep down, I know that's not the case.

I'm afraid of losing Alyssa. My father already tried to get rid of her once. He hates losing, and I would expect that he'll plan something else for her. If I had it my way, I wouldn't let her set foot back in Rivendell, but she needs to do this for the witches. I just have to trust that everything will go according to plan.

"Are you okay?" Alyssa asks after I finish explaining the plan.

"Yeah. Do you have everything?"

"Yes, James, this is the fourth time you've asked me. I still have the gun and the bullets," she rolls her eyes dramatically.

I saw how powerful Alyssa is, but I won't allow her to go back into the territory without a backup plan. I made sure that everyone had one.

When the clock strikes midnight, we all leave for Rivendell. As predicted, there are guards everywhere in town, so we take the forest route. A blend of the devil's breath and magic mint work like magic when blown into the air. The guards fall, unconscious, and we get through the forest and into the mansion.

A small group diverts to the servant's quarters. They have to get the remaining witches and get them to safety.

Alyssa and I walk into the house as the others go to their respective positions. The house is oddly quiet; there are no guards, and it feels like we are walking into a trap. I signal Alyssa to walk behind me as we walk as quietly as we can.

We walk down the hall and into my father's study. As I expected, he's in there, having a drink and going through papers that are sprawled on his desk. He doesn't look up, nor does he look shocked to see us. On the contrary, he looks bored and unfazed by our entrance.

After a while, He gives us a spiteful glance and goes back to work. I make myself comfortable and gesture to Alyssa to do the same. I know what he's playing at, and good thing I'm an expert in acting like nothing bothers me.

“What do you want, James?” he grumbles when the uncomfortable silence becomes too much for him.

“Why don’t you tell us why you accused my parents of killing your mate.”

That catches his attention. He takes a sip of his drink and looks at Alyssa, scrutinizing her features.

“I now remember why you look so familiar. You must be Victoria and Noah’s kid. The ones who wouldn’t shut up about equality and fairness. How did you survive? Don’t answer that. I don’t care,” he says dismissively.

“What do you want, witch? Power? Just like your greedy parents?” he scoffs.

“Don’t talk to her like that,” I jump in.

He laughs as he pours himself another shot. Until now, I’ve never noticed how much he gets drunk. Come to think of it, I don’t think I’ve ever seen his hand empty after my mother’s death.

“Why did you accuse them? They were innocent.”

He leans back in his chair and stares at his full glass blankly as if he’s going back in time to that day.

“I had the perfect plan to finally stop them from pestering me. I was going to kill them,” he smiles, and for the first time, I see my father for who he really is.

“I hired someone to do the dirty work during the council meeting, but they messed up.”

“What do you mean?” Alyssa asks.

“Someone in that room changed the course of the knife, and it got to your mother.”

For years, I thought that he was the good guy for punishing those who killed her. I even followed in his footsteps, for Star’s sake.

“Who changed it?” I ask.

He shrugs, “No one knows,”

“The magic should have left a trail. You know who did it,” Alyssa insists.

“You killed her,” I say spitefully.

“I didn’t. The witches did, and they deserve everything that has happened to them.”

“It’s your fault. If you hadn’t planned on killing my mate’s parents, she’d still be alive,” I argue.

“You don’t know anything, James. If you mark her as your mate, she’ll take everything away from you, tables will turn, and you’ll be her servant. Don’t do it, James.”

There it is again, always belittling me and thinking that he knows what’s good for me. I can’t believe that at one point in my life, I looked up to him.

“You can’t tell me what to do with my life,” I bark.

“Yes, I can. You are still young. You don’t...”

Alyssa’s scream breaks us out of our argument. My blood freezes cold when I see the huge blade held against her throat and the huge man restraining her. I knew he would do something like this.

“I thought you were smarter than this, James. You know that I don’t like losing.”

“Let her go!”

“If you move, she dies,” he says to me and then turns to Alyssa, “If you try any of that magic crap, you die.”

“Thank you for bringing her to me. I didn’t even know that she had powers until she mentioned it. Do you know how many things I can achieve with her blood? No wonder Carmella was obsessed with her.”

“Don’t do this.”

“Take her away,” he orders the bulky man.

Alyssa looks at me with fear in her eyes as the man drags her away. It hurts to watch yet another person taking her away

from me. The only issue is that they never learn what happens after they take her away from me.

“What do you want?”

“Stop this little revolution of yours. Let’s go back to how we were, find a pure-bred mate, and then we can move on with our lives.”

“That will never happen.”

“Okay, it’s your choice, son. Your supposed mate is going to be locked up forever. Her only job will be to get me some of that magic blood,” he gloats.

I feel sick to my stomach. *How is this the same man I’ve known all my life? When did he become so cruel and merciless?*

“Why do you hate witches so much?”

“They should have died instead of my mate. They took her away from me.”

“What would she say if she were here?” I point to her portrait.

He grunts in response as he looks at the portrait, contemplating my question. He knows that my mother would never stand for any discrimination. I wonder what she ever saw in him. They are polar opposites, and she definitely didn’t deserve to die because her mate was greedy.

When I hear the ringing in my ears, I know that it’s time to strike.

“You’ve always underestimated me, father. I know every move you try to pull,” I say as Alyssa walks back into the room without a scratch on her body.

“What’s going on?” he asks, alarmed.

“I knew you’d do something like this. You are so predictable.”

He laughs bitterly, “You don’t...”

His next words are never heard. My blade slices swiftly across his neck. It takes him a second to figure out what’s going on. His hands go to his throat as he chokes on his blood.

“Are you okay?” I turn to Alyssa as my father breathes his last breath behind me.

“Yes,” she says and runs to hug me.

I drop the blade to the floor. I can't believe that it's over.

The werewolves who were loyal to my father are rounded up and gathered in front of the house. They deserve the same fate as their master. However, I'm not trying to repeat history. Enough blood has been shed.

“You have two choices. You can either stay and be loyal to me, or you can leave and find another pack.”

They look at each other, surprised that I would let them walk free. It has never been heard of in the history of the territory. Traitors are being left to go scot-free.

A few of them walk away, and the rest join the others.

“No kind of discrimination will be allowed in Rivendell. If you can't stand being around other creatures, you can leave too.”

No one leaves. I hope that they'll keep up with that rule. If they don't, then I'll have no option but to end them.

“Finally, this is my mate and your future Luna, Alyssa Martins.”

I've waited for so long to say those words to my pack. It's been a hellish ride, but we finally made it, and I've never been happier. A cheer erupts from the crowd, and there are even some howls,

It will take some time for the werewolves to get used to being referred to as equals with other creatures, but it's something we can all work on.

“You did it,” I whisper to Alyssa as we watch the crowd interact.

She smiles back at me and holds my hand, “We did it.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

A COUPLE OF WEEKS have gone by since James and I took over Easton's territory, and so far, I've had the best time of my life. James and I can't get enough of each other. After freeing the witches, the dead bodies were discarded, Mr. Easton's body was burned, and the house was cleansed.

Right afterward, we renovated the entire house. I tried to find a magic trail to the knife that was used to kill James's mother, but the trail had already been wiped by the time I got to it. We then assumed it all happened by chance.

The house no longer hosts the Easton family alone. There are all kinds of creatures living here, from elves to fairies and witches. When other magical creatures heard that Rivendell was safe, they came out of hiding. James and I decided that it was unfair to have such a huge house all to ourselves.

The witches had a choice to go to Meda's village or to stay in Rivendell. As I expected, many of them chose the village. Meda was very welcoming to the witches, and those who stayed in Rivendell were still given the chance to visit the village any time they liked.

Rivendell has changed so much. It's bursting with different creatures, it's lively, everyone's happy, and most importantly, they get along very well with each other.

We have been working on forming a new council and having representatives for all creatures. The head of the council title will be rotated among the creatures, starting with witches. They have chosen me to be their representative, an honorable position that I treasure.

Since James already had his crowning ceremony. I will get a smaller version of it to be crowned as the Luna.

“Are you nervous?”

James asks as we wait for the ceremony to start. We are in the forest, the exact place where we buried Maggie a few months ago. I wanted her to be included in the ceremony. The patch of flowers that grew when she died has blossomed into a huge garden of flowers. It feels like she’s here with me.

“A little bit,” I confess.

I never thought that I would be ruling over the werewolves one day. I’m scared that they’ll still have their old opinions of witches and won’t accept me as their Luna.

“It’s going to be alright,” he squeezes my hand and plants a small kiss on my cheek.

Orla arrives soon afterward with the most dramatic entry I have ever seen. She brought everything with her: the skulls, scythe, ravens, and even the green man who still appears as a human-looking figure with a fresh leaf coming from his dried branches. She looks like the best description of a death queen.

“Everyone wanted to watch,” Orla explains her baggage.

“Who’s everyone?” James asks, and I nudge him in the ribs.

He’s yet to learn that when Orla says something strange, you don’t question it unless you want to go down a very dark hole of all kinds of strange things.

“Where’s Meda?”

“I’m here,” she announces her arrival in a sing-song voice.

“Let’s get started.”

It’s surreal to think that just a few months ago, I was a servant, and now I’m queen.



Orla prepares her skulls, and Meda lays out her magical tools on the ground. Orla, of course, takes longer, and we have to help her to speed up the ceremony.

“Step forward,” Meda instructs me.

She takes a bowl of what I assume is ash and draws the moons on my forehead, just like her tattoos. Orla joins her and draws sun wheels on my temples. Meda then crushes lavender petals into her hands and sprinkles them on top of my head. It’s supposed to give me good luck.

Orla grabs some flowers from the garden and speaks into them in her palms. She repeats the same thing Meda does. If didn’t know them any better, I would have thought that they were trying to outdo each other, but they are both representations of the two sides of witchcraft that I have.

For me to be bonded with the werewolves, we have to please the moon goddess first so that she doesn’t feel abandoned when I have a deeper bond with James and the pack.

Meda slits my palm and collects my blood in a bowl.

“Accept this sacrifice, oh Moon Goddess. Grant her whatever she seeks,” she says as she raises the bowl above my head.

I expected to feel weaker after the connection between me and the goddess was cut off, but I don’t feel any different. Orla skips Meda’s steps and speaks into the skulls.

“You’ll be bonded to someone new, but never forget that you belonged to them first,” Orla says, referring to the goddess.

“Okay. That’s done, on to the next step.”

I’m going to be bonded to James and his pack. Unlike the personal bond with the goddess, the werewolf bond is never private. Everything is shared among the pack. It is said to make the connection stronger.

James will be participating in this one. He still has to mark me as his mate and then introduce me to the pack.

“Do we get to watch this part?” Orla asks, winking at us, but it just looks odd.

“Orla! Let’s go!” Meda yells at her.

When they leave, I turn to face James.

“Are you ready for this?”

“Will it hurt?”

He smirks, “No, you’ll love it.”

He kisses me first until I become weak in the knees and can no longer hold myself up. He then trails small kisses along my jaw, on my cheeks, and teasingly on my earlobe.

His lips then meet the sensitive skin between my neck and my collarbone. He kisses it, licking and biting until I can’t take it anymore.

He growls in my ear, and I shiver with pleasure. His teeth graze lightly on my neck, and then he sinks them into my skin. Ecstasy rolls through me as my moans get louder. I never thought that getting bitten could feel this good. It’s a different kind of pleasure that my mind can’t even comprehend.

James withdraws his teeth and licks the wound, soothing it until it’s no longer visible. Memories flood into my head all at once, and it throws me off my balance for a second.

*Are you okay?* James’s voice rings in my head.

“Yes, I’m fine.”

I frown when I say the words out loud instead of into his head.

“It will take some time to get used to it. I’ll teach you.”

We join the others in the backyard to make it official. My hands start sweating when we get closer to the crowd.

*Please let them accept me,* I say a little prayer as I rub my sweaty palms against my clothes.

“This pack has been through so much since we lost our Luna twenty years ago. However, the goddess has remembered us. Today, I bring you our Luna, who will bring stability to the pack.”

For a full minute, and yes, I count, silence follows, then weakly from the back, a small howl. Others join progressively,

then the whole pack. I let out a relieved breath.

*I love you.*

James winks at me, and my heart flutters.



I can't believe that it's been a year since I was crowned as the Luna. At first, it was difficult to manage being a witch and my duties as Luna, but now I'm used to it. Turns out that ruling over thousands of creatures takes up all your energy. Don't get me wrong, I love it, but I can't wait for my term on the council to come to an end. Then, I can have more time with James.

More creatures have moved to Rivendell, and it's no longer the small town it was a year ago. The witches' village has also grown, and it's no longer hidden. I never thought a time would come when witches would live freely.

I have been getting necromancing lessons from Orla. It's more interesting than I thought, and even though Orla insists that I will take over for her someday, I couldn't handle the responsibility of millions of souls.

"What are you thinking about?"

James hugs me from behind, pulling me into his very present erection.

"Us," I giggle as I move my body on him.

"Tell me more," he kisses the side of my neck.

"I love that everything worked out. I can't imagine a life without you," I turn to face him.

"Why are you crying? Isn't that a good thing?"

I place my hand on my tummy, and I rub it, hoping that he'll get it. James is oblivious to my clue and keeps on showering me with kisses.

"James!"

"What? You are just so irresistible."

My cheeks grow hot. After all this time, he still makes me blush like it's the first time. I rub my tummy aggressively this

time.

His eyes widen, and then he lifts me and spins me around,  
“Really? Are you?”

“Yes, please put me down,” I laugh in delight.

James kisses me, then proceeds to kiss my stomach even though it’s barely showing.

“I love you,” he says in between the kisses.

“What are you doing?” Becky makes a face when she finds James on one knee, his mouth pressed to my stomach and one hand up my dress, rubbing on my stomach.

“We are going to have a baby,” he announces excitedly.

“I know that already. I was the first person to know.”

Becky has been living with us in the mansion ever since the night when the three of us left Rivendell. However, lately, she has been spending most of her time in the village. I think she wants to move there, but she doesn’t know how to tell me yet.

Her words don’t deter James’s happiness. He goes into the house, telling anyone who’ll listen that he’s going to be a father.

“He’s crazy.”

“Yeah, I know, I love him.”

“I wanted to talk to you about something,” she fidgets with her hands.

“I know, Becky,” I place my hands over hers.

“We have been together ever since we were kids. I don’t want to leave you,” she says through tears.

Her words take me back to our servant days when our fate was already decided for us; we would be servants till death. No one would have guessed that someday we would have free will to do whatever want.

Every day feels unreal. I still can’t believe that I’m Luna and mated to the most powerful alpha.

“I know it’s hard, Becky, but we are finally free.”

DID YOU LIKE THIS book? Then you'll LOVE...

**The Court's Fate.**

**The Moon Goddess mated me with a witch that will be the death of me.**

**But I can't keep my eyes off her.**

Her mother was taken hostage by my father, the werewolf King.

She is the last of her magical bloodline and the only one that can reach the artifact we need to stop the evil Vampire King from wiping us off the face of the earth.

As the Alpha, I was picked to join her on this quest.

Regina is gorgeous, with long black hair and eyes that can see into my soul.

But she hates my kind with a passion.

I must make her see that not all wolves are bad.

The longer she's around me, the more I watch her walls dissolve, and her feelings grow.

When she told me that she wouldn't let my species be wiped out, I knew the Moon Goddess got it right. *She is my mate.*

I never thought I would have a witch on my side willing to fight fang and spell,

And with her, it will be impossible for that bloodsucker to win.

Start reading Chapter One of [The Court's Fate](#) NOW! Turn the page.

## Sneak Peek - Chapter One

Start reading [The Court's Fate](#) NOW!

Little Abby couldn't wait to see the special surprise her mother promised her. Excitedly, she bounced as her mother led them through the lush, green forest. She was a seven-year-old girl with short, curly brown hair that bounced with every hop she took. She wore a pink shirt with a unicorn print and green shorts that hit just above her knees.

Her elder sister, Regina, was twelve years old and taller than Abby. She had long, straight black hair tied up in a high ponytail. She wore a red t-shirt and jean shorts that showed off her long, lean legs. Her eyes were a deep brown and sparkled with excitement and envy as she followed her mother and sister through the forest.

Regina knew what their mother would reveal, having overheard their mother's hushed whispers the night before, but she had never seen it in living color.

As they walked deeper into the forest, the rustling of leaves under their feet was the only sound they could hear. Abby looked around with wonder, taking in the beauty of the tall trees and the colorful flowers that grew beneath them. She felt like she was in a magical wonderland.

"When will you show me, Mom?" Abby asked eagerly, unable to contain her excitement.

"Just a bit longer, honey," Margaret replied, a smile playing on her lips. She was a woman in her early thirties, with long, chestnut brown hair that cascaded down her back in loose waves. Her face was framed by soft, wispy bangs that fell across her forehead. She had deep brown eyes that sparkled with excitement and a hint of mischief as she led her daughters through the forest.

She wore a loose-fitting white blouse that billowed in the gentle breeze and a pair of faded blue jeans that hugged her curves in all the right places.

She led them down a narrow path, and the trees grew more dense as they walked.

As they walked, the sun rose, casting a golden glow over the forest. Little Abby's heart leaped with joy at the sight, and she skipped ahead, unable to contain her excitement any longer. She turned back to her mother and sister, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"I can't wait to see it!" she exclaimed.

Her mother walked up to her and smiled, touching her shoulder. "You're going to love it," she said.

With renewed energy, they continued deeper into the forest, their anticipation building with every step. Little Abby's heart raced as they approached a clearing, and then, her mother stopped.

"Close your eyes, sweetie," Margaret said, her voice gentle.

Abby did as she was told, her heart thumping in her chest. She listened to her mother move away and heard her voice again after what felt like an eternity.

"Okay, you can open them now."

Abby slowly opened her eyes, blinking in the bright sunlight. As she looked up, her breath caught in her throat, and her heart swelled with wonder. The sky was ablaze with a spectrum of colors like an artist had taken a brush and painted it with different hues of pink, orange, and purple. There wasn't a single cloud in sight, only the sun radiating its warmth and casting a golden glow over the landscape.

Abby felt like she had been transported to a magical world where dreams come true. The colors of the sky danced and swirled around her like a beautiful painting brought to life. She couldn't believe her eyes, and for a moment, she thought she must be dreaming.

"Oh my god, Mom," Abby said as her face lit up. "This is... this is so amazing."

A smile danced on Margaret's lips after seeing the astonishment on her daughter's face.

Abby and Regina stood side by side, their eyes fixated on the mesmerizing sky, oblivious to the world around them.

Margaret watched them, a small smile playing on her lips, happy to see her daughters lost in the beauty of nature.

Suddenly, a low growl broke the silence, and Margaret's head snapped toward the sound. A few feet behind Abby stood a massive black wolf, its eyes fixed on the little girl. Its fur was sleek and glossy, and its fangs were elongated and dripping with saliva.

For a moment, time stood still. Margaret's and Regina's hearts raced with fear as they tried to assess the situation.

"Abby, don't move," Regina whispered, her face horrified.

Margaret also froze in her spot as terror overcame her, but Abby was unaware that the wolf was behind her.

"What, Regina?" Abby asked.

"Don't move," Regina whispered again.

But Abby moved. She turned around and saw the wolf right in front of her.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAHHH." Her scream pierced the silence of the forest.

Before Margaret or Regina could react, the wolf lunged at little Abby and tore her heart out of her chest in a single swift motion.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" Margaret's screams echoed through the forest, her voice raw with anguish and fear.

The wolf swallowed Abby's heart like it was the tastiest meal he ever had. His razor-sharp teeth dripped with crimson blood as he raised his head, fixing his steely gaze on Margaret and Regina. Regina's blood boiled as she looked at the wolf; her hands glowed. The anger inside her activated her magic, radiating all around her body.

Margaret, on the other hand, was shocked. She froze like a statue as tears streamed down her face. She knew that Abby was gone, and her heart shattered into a million pieces at the sight of her lifeless form. She glared at the wolf staring at them as a drop of blood fell from his mouth. He bared his sharp teeth and was ready to attack her, but before he could,



Margaret murmured a spell and pushed her hands toward the wolf, releasing a blast of blue rays. The wolf, quick and agile, dodged her attack with ease and disappeared deep into the forest, leaving Margaret to stare helplessly after it.

Abby's body lay crumpled on the ground, blood pooling around her in a macabre display. There was a gaping hole in her chest, and her lifeless eyes stared up at the skies above. Margaret, heartbroken, fell to her knees beside her daughter, her sobs wracking her body.

Regina couldn't let the wolf run away, so she took off after it as her hands glowed, ready to use her magic. The wolf was running fast as if it had some superpower. She knew it was not an ordinary wolf but a werewolf, and she would not let it disappear. Chasing it on foot was impossible, so she used the flying spell her aunt had taught her a month ago. She focused all her energy on that spell, her muscles tensing as she summoned the power within her.

Suddenly, Regina felt a surge of energy flow through her, and she felt weightless. The glow in her hands disappeared. With a gasp, she lifted off the ground, her body soaring through the air with the grace of a bird. She chased the werewolf, her eyes locked onto its retreating form, and with the speed of the wind, she closed in on it.

Regina lunged at the werewolf with a fierce cry, her hands grasping at its neck. She ripped its head off with brutal force, and the werewolf's body slumped to the ground, now lifeless.

With heavy steps, Regina returned to where Margaret sat, cradling her daughter's lifeless body. The air was thick with the stench of death, and Margaret's mournful sobs echoed through the forest.

Regina's heart ached at the sight before her, and tears welled up in her eyes. She knelt beside her, her hand touching Abby's cold cheek.

Her skin was clammy, and Regina shuddered at the thought of the life that had once pulsed through Abby's veins, now gone forever. Margaret's sobs grew louder, and Regina wrapped her

arms around her grieving mother, holding her tightly as they cried together.

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## The Alpha's Council

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**My mate is a blood witch and my sworn enemy.**

But when she strolled those long legs into my council chamber, I wanted nothing more than to sink my teeth into her.

I was either going to mark her or something equally as dangerous, and I warred with my wolf over the witch.

Bodies start dropping in our world, and she jumps at the chance to investigate the issue with me. So, when my 3<sup>rd</sup> in command turns up as a corpse, she's my number 1 suspect.

The ancient Vampire leader joins us on our trip, and my wolf is jealous of how friendly they have become in a short time.

He also knows she's my mate.

Keeping that from her will make this investigation harder than she makes me. But I have to find the culprit.

Being close to her is a distraction and a curse, and exactly where I want her. I just hope I'm not next on her list.

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